

Scars: Frequently asked questions

What are the limitations of scar treatments?

Scars cannot be removed completely. Depending on the type of scar and treatment programme, up to 40% improvement is achievable for most people. Some people do not respond at all and some respond very well. It is not possible to predict who will respond poorly to treatment.

What are the side effects?

Side effects vary with the type of treatment:

Fractionated CO₂ laser:

- redness for 7 – 10 days (all patients)
- swelling and crusting for 48 hours (all patients)
- skin peeling (like a sun-burn) after 48 hours to about one week (all patients)
- persistent redness (a few patients only)
- infection (uncommon)
- altered skin pigmentation - increased or reduced (uncommon)
- scarring (rare)

Subcision:

- swelling (all patients)
- red dots at site of skin entry – settled within a few days (all patients)
- bruising (common)
- infection (rare)

Pulsed-dye laser:

- redness and swelling (all patients)
- purple dots and bruising – settles usually in 7 – 10 days (most patients)
- blister, crusting or scab (possible)
- infection (rare)
- scar (rare)
- blindness – protective eyewear required (very rare)

Please note: this is only a guide and all procedure benefits, limitations and risks will be fully explained prior to procedure. Risks will vary depending on individual patient factors, the specific laser used and the expertise and technical finesse of the laser operator.

I have been told that my skin is not suitable for laser. Can I have scar treatment?

There are several reasons why you may have been told that your skin is not suitable for laser treatment. There are lots of different types of laser. Fractionated CO₂ laser can be used on all skin types. If you have any questions about your suitability for laser treatment, please get in touch with the laser clinic.

Can I have laser treatment for acne scars if my acne is still active?

No, if your acne is still active and you are getting new scars it is not a good idea to have scar treatment. The laser can cause active acne to flare up.

Can I have acne scar treatment if I have been treated with isotretinoin?

Treatment is not advised until six months after completion of your isotretinoin (Roaccutane) treatment. Isotretinoin can impair healing and increases the risk of scars.

I have a scar from surgery – can this be treated?

Yes, surgical scars can be treated to improve their appearance. This can be done two to four weeks after skin surgery. It is very important to ask your surgeon whether or not it is OK to have laser treatment for your scar.

Are there any circumstances which may mean that I cannot have laser treatment?

Yes, if you have had recent significant sun exposure or if you have cold sores or an active skin infection then it is best not to go ahead and have treatment and to delay it until any tan or infection has resolved.

How painful is treatment?

We take measures to ensure that any pain or discomfort is kept to a minimum.

Local anaesthetic cream is used prior to fractionated CO₂ laser treatment and the sensation during treatment feels like a hot prickly sensation. Cool air is used for comfort during the procedure. Afterward the skin will feel warm much like a sunburn.

Injection anaesthetic is used for subcisions and excisions. Injection anaesthetic stings for a short period of time. The anaesthetic wears off after a couple of hours and then paracetamol can be taken if needed.

What do I do if I am worried after a procedure?

The laser clinic is open from 9am until 7pm on weekdays and from 9am until 1pm on Saturdays. Please telephone 020 7435 7521 for advice. Out of hours you can attend A&E at the Royal Free Hospital who will provide advice.