



Lowe Plastic Surgery (LPS)

Dr. Lowe's Facts about Surgical Scar Revision

Will my scar look better?

Scar treatment can be performed using a variety of techniques that include: chemicals, topical medications, steroid injections, dermabrasion or lasers, and surgery. Laser scar treatment involves often expensive technology, but it is usually very quick, predictable, and controlled. It is the limited recovery of laser that makes it the most popular current non-surgical ways to treat scars on the surface of skin. However, most lasers treat only the outer layer of the skin which may or may not treat more significant scars. Surgical scar revision is usually reserved for scars that have been present for some time or those that are unresponsive to other conservative treatments. Most plastic surgeons break surgical scars into three categories. One third of scars will most likely improve with surgery, one third may improve with surgery, and one third will most likely not improve with surgery. If your surgeon thinks that surgical scar revision is indicated there is not guarantee that the scar will be better and there is always a chance that it will be the same or worse. Surgical scar revision usually requires close follow up care and the combination of topical or injectable steroids and in some case post-surgical radiation or revision. A consultation with your board certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist can help patients decide the option that is best for them. Please check out websites and links at: www.drjlowe.com

Are some patients just prone to scars?

Scarring after injury and surgery can be related to a number of clinical factors. The degree of scarring can depend on the severity of the tissue injury, the amount of tension, sutures used, and the surgical technique. The degree of scarring can also relate to the location of the injury on the body and the color of the patients skin. Typically, the color of a patient's skin determines the recovery and quality of the scar. Darker skinned patients tend to scar more than lighter skin patients. Black patients are more commonly prone to hypertrophic or keloid (severe) scarring. However, really light skinned or pale patients with red hair often produce terrible scars that are raised, red, painful, and which often take an extended time to fully mature. The patient's age will often determine the scar, as younger patients typically scar more aggressively in most situations because their cells are turning over more aggressively. Environmental factors such as excessive sun exposure or tissue trauma will negatively impact scars. Clinical interventions such as topical treatments, injections, lasers may be highly effective in one person and ineffective in the next. The degree of scarring in one person versus the next is first and foremost related to the patient's own genetic makeup. Although plastic surgeons are highly skilled at identifying clinical trends and relationships, they are unable to fully predict the degree of scarring or the results of scar revision in any individual patient.

What do you think about micro-peels or micro-dermabrasion for scars?

Minimally invasive procedures are associated with minimal results. These procedures are best performed at a spa and are usually quite safe when performed by a professional. Most patients report small improvements in scars at best. It is difficult to know how many minimal treatments it would take to equal a standard surgical or even laser treatment. Dr. Lowe is committed to a true clinically effective treatment and leaves the feel good treatments to the medical spas and aestheticians.

How effective are medically prescribed skin care regimens?

Medically prescribed skin care regimens are an important part of skin rejuvenation. Many skin lines provide modest improvement in the skin texture or superficial scars over time. Effective skin care regimens require patients to follow a strict protocol and long-term patients in order to see noticeable results over 13-18 week period. The skin program must provide medically prescribed agents at an appropriate strength to truly improve scars. Most programs include a skin lightener (Hydroquinone) and a skin stimulator (Tretinoin or Retin-A). Almost no over-the-counter skin line can provide effective dosing without a physician prescription or supervision. Skin care is an excellent adjunct to scar treatments, but is ineffective alone for most significant or chronic scars. Your physician or health care professional can help you develop a skin care program that is right for you before or after scar treatment when indicated.

What is the best laser for scarring?

There are a number of lasers that are popular in the treatment of superficial scars. The two most popular resurfacing devices are CO2 and Erbium lasers. Each laser can be used to remove the out layer of the skin quite effectively. The CO2 laser is less popular because of an extended down-time and recovery. It is associated with a higher risk of scarring and loss of natural skin color. The Erbium laser requires more treatments but the downtime is limited to 4-5 days in most situations. The cost of 4-5 Erbium laser treatments is usually less than just one treatment with a conventional CO2 laser. Another lasers often used to treat scars is the V-Beam (PDL) this laser is effective at improving deep red or thickened scars. Multiple lasers or often used to treat scars depending on the scars color, location, and consistency.

Most deep or significant scars do not respond to laser treatment alone. A consultation with your board certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist can assist patients in determining the best scar treatment regimen.

Are there substantial risks related to surgical scar treatment?

All surgical procedures are associated with a certain amount of risk. The risks are often associated with a patient's skin color or consistency. Darker skin types are at a higher risk of scarring and hyperpigmentation (dark spots) following scar revision. Most patient's considering surgical scar revision are at an increased risk of recurrent scarring. The risk of surgical scar revision include: bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structures, pain, , need for revision, poor aesthetic results, bruising, swelling, crusting, virus activation, and worsening scar. The more aggressive the surgical treatment and the more significant the degree of scarring will result in a higher overall risk of surgery. Surgical scar revision and follow-up is always a balance between "pain & gain." Your board certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist can assist you with choosing the treatment that is right for you.

Is surgical scar treatment painful or time consuming?

Surgical scar revisions are usually performed in the office under local anesthetic. A number of patients require sedation in advance with a medication by mouth. Larger scars in complex locations require the surgery to be performed at a surgical center or hospital under general anesthetic. Most patients require suture removal within 7-14 days and close follow up for several months. Many patients will require an intense regimen of ant-scar treatments beginning about a month after surgery. Some patients will be required to wear compression devises or undergo month steroid injections. Most patients with keloids (severe scars) will be required to undergo post-surgical radiation to decrease the risk of recurrence. Some patients will require external message or preventative laser treatments. Patients who are considering surgical scar revision should make sure that they are willing and able to be compliant with the post-surgical recommendations, recovery, and follow up care.

How much improvement can I expect with surgical scar treatment?

Surgical scar revision in the right patient seems to be a good balance between down-time and results. It is indicated in patients with scars that have been resistant to other treatments. It is not a treatment that will usually go unnoticed by friends and co-workers depending on the location. Patients are often required to miss work for 1-2 weeks depending on the situation. Surgical scar revision will in no way provide patients with instant results. Patients often are required to undergo adjuvant care and follow up for over one year. It will usually take 2 years for the scar to fully mater and for patients to know for sure that the revision was successful. Patients will be required to avoid sun, message wounds, limit activity, and use anti-scar products as instructed during the recovery period.

Is surgical scar revision covered by health insurance?

Surgical scar revision in many clinical situations is covered by your insurance plan. Most insurance plans require conservative management of scars including injection and time prior surgical revision. A pre-approval process is almost always required prior to surgical treatment of scars. This requires the physician to provide written and photographic documentation prior to approval. Many medical insurance plans consider scars to be "cosmetic" problems and deny surgical revisions. Just because the insurance approves one treatment that does not mean that they will approve all treatments. Dr. Lowe will discuss these issues during the course of your consultation and consent process.

How much does surgical scar treatment cost?

The cost of surgical scar revision depends on time and complexity of the problem. Most insurance plans reimburse based on the size and location of the scar as well as the complexity of the surgical closure. Dr. Lowe will provide cosmetic or self-pay patients with a surgical quote for the cost of the procedure. This quote does not include the cost of revision surgery or other post-operative procedures in most cases. Dr. Lowe often discounts surgical scar treatment for his previously established patients who he has operated on. On occasion, Dr. Lowe may want to just test nonsurgical treatments such as steroid injections or laser treatments prior to procedure with surgical scar revision. The practice will be able to provide you with the cost of non-surgical or surgical treatments after your professional consultation.

When and where do you perform surgical scar treatments?

All patients considering surgical scar revision are required to see Dr. Lowe in consultation prior to treatment. Some patient may not schedule a surgical scar revision for several months after consultation depending on their schedule or time of year. Our practice provides surgical scar revisions at set time points throughout the calendar month. We usually perform surgical scar revisions in our office on Wednesday mornings or at the hospital at different times during the week depending on the schedule. Patients may check with our office for potential surgical days and the cost after their professional consultation.

Should surgical scar treatments be combined with other nonsurgical procedures?

Surgical scar treatments are often combined with other treatments. Additional treatments may include lasers with Intense Pulse Light (IPL), V-Beam (PDL), or a resurfacing device (Erbium or CO2). Many patients will undergo an injection with steroid on the same day as surgical or laser treatment. However, more costly or lengthy procedures such as radiation treatments must be scheduled with the specialist long in advance to insure safety and insurance coverage when indicated. Surgical scar revision must be performed efficiently and properly on surgical days to ensure the most cost effective and safe patient care. Patients who have had a consultation with Dr. Lowe and who are interested in a specific surgical day are encouraged to check with our office in advance.

What is the downtime related to surgical scar treatment?

In our practice, the recovery from surgical scar revision depends on the size and location of the scar. Only the surgeon can determine if surgical scar revision is indicated and the length of the average recovery. Dr. Lowe is committed to providing patients with an effective and safe surgery. The downtime associated with the typical treatment is 1-2 weeks. The patients are often able to return to work the same day or the day after as long as they are able to limit activity. Most patients are comfortable in public places after a week with full recovery of the scar taking 6 months to 2 years in some cases. Every patient has different skin and different expectations or definitions about down-time. Patients should undergo surgical scar revision at least 3-4 weeks prior to a major event such as a wedding or anniversary. A patient may elect to have a more or less aggressive scar treatment based on their clinical or social situation. Dr. Lowe and our staff can provide you with further information about downtime and recovery during your consultation.

Is surgical scar treatment right for me?

In most cases, surgical scar revision is not something that a patient needs; it is something a patient wants. There is a financial and personal cost for patients who desire noticeable scar improvement. There are a variety of options to improve scars. These include skin care, injections, resurfacing, laser procedures, and surgery to name just a few. Surgical scar treatment in the right patient will usually provide modest results at a limited cost. The treatment is not associated with undue risk in most cases. Many of our patients who undergo surgical scar treatment in one area decide to treat other areas thereafter, which is a testament to its effectiveness in the right patient group. No surgical procedure is without risk or cost, but surgical is often effective when other treatments have failed. Patients should carefully weigh the pros and cons of surgical scar revision before scheduling the procedure. Each patient is unique, a consultation with a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon or Dermatologist can help you determine what options best suite your situation and pocket book. Surgical scar revision is often the right thing for the right person. For further information check out our website or other helpful links at www.drjlowe.com

What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?

1. Surgical scar revision should be individualized based on patient's features, concerns, and expectations.
2. Scars include three groups. Good chance, small chance, and poor chance to improve with surgery.
3. Understand risks (bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structures, pain, and worse scaring).
4. Insurance may not pay for surgical scar revision and never pay for lasers in our practice.
5. Scars should be revised only to improve or conceal color, texture, discomfort, or location.
6. Surgical treatment will almost always leave a longer scar that hopefully looks and feels better.
7. Topical medications, injections, message, lasers, and radiation may be required to improve results.
8. Surgical scars may take up to 2 years to fully mature and follow up may be required during that period.
9. Scars treatment in many cases is predictable, but on occasion is completely unpredictable.
10. Some are genetically prone to scars in certain areas, with certain materials, and in certain situations.
11. Physician certification and safety matters when undergoing surgical scar revision.