



# Desensitisation

**After an injury or operation, nerves within the skin can sometimes become overly sensitive. Scars can become tender, particularly during the early healing phase.**

If the scar is sensitive the tendency is to avoid touching it or performing activities that make it feel worse. This leaflet provides you with information on how to make sensations to the skin feel more normal, this is known as desensitisation.

## General instructions

Many of these activities involve touch and can be done on a daily basis and incorporated into your normal routine. Where possible, feel the sensation on a part of your body not affected first, remember how that normal sensation felt, then apply it to the affected area.

## Regular practice: little and often

Regular practice of these activities will increase the benefit. A short period of desensitisation (even 1–2 minutes) as many times as possible throughout the day is recommended. It might be helpful to set aside particular times during the day to perform them. A quiet, relaxed environment with few distractions will help you to concentrate on the task.

## Discomfort

It is usual for these activities to be uncomfortable and may be painful. You may find that there are certain activities that you are unable to tolerate. Choose one that you feel comfortable with and gradually progress to others. If you experience intolerable pain and discomfort, then stop that activity and move on to one that is more tolerable.

## Concentration is important

To help normalise the system, it is important that you concentrate on the quality of the sensation. This can be done first on a limb unaffected, concentrate on how this sensation feels, remember it and then undertake the activity on the affected area, whilst looking at it and thinking about it.

### 1) Use of different textures

Applying different textures to the skin is another way to re-educate the sensory system.

Gather a variety of rough and smooth textures that you can tolerate. Here are some suggestions:

- Smooth - Felt, satin, silk, velvet, make-up or soft paint brushes
- Rough - towelling, netting, scourers, flannel, wool, Velcro
- Immerse your hand into containers containing different textured particles such as lentils, rice, pastry, sand
- Different temperatures of water.

Place them on your unaffected limb and apply movements such as light stroking, firm stroking, tapping and circular actions. Note the various normal sensations that you feel. Now on the affected limb, apply the texture in similar movements working from an area that you can tolerate towards the more uncomfortable skin areas, for example from the top of the arm towards the hand.

Concentrate on the area by looking at it and thinking about it. Recall the normal sensations that you felt on the unaffected limb.

Desensitisation can be incorporated into activities of daily living as part of your normal routine. Some suggested activities are:

- **In bed** - Feel the bed sheet against your unaffected limb. Close your eyes and concentrate on the quality of that sensation. Now feel the bed sheet against your affected area and recall how that normal sensation felt whilst thinking about the area you are touching



- **Having a bath or shower** - Select a water temperature that you can tolerate. Feel the water on your unaffected limb and now on your affected limb whilst looking at it and thinking about it. Recall how that normal sensation of the water felt against your skin
- **Dressing** - Concentrate on your affected limb by looking at it and thinking about it as you get dressed. Feel the texture of the garment against your skin both on the unaffected and the affected areas
- **Cooking** - concentrate on the texture of the utensils and foods and the actions you are performing.

## 2) Massage

Massaging the scar can also be beneficial. It will help reduce tenderness, increase stretch and restore the scar to a normal appearance. This can be done by either yourself or someone else.

### Techniques:

- Place your fingertip on the scar and firmly move the scar in four directions: forwards, backwards, left and right, hold each position for five seconds and repeat. Carry out this exercise without moisturiser
- Hold the top and bottom of the scar - stretch along its length with your fingers and thumb. Hold at the end for five seconds. Carry out this exercise without moisturiser
- Massage with moisturiser (non-perfumed). Deeply massage the scar for five minutes four times a day, last one before sleep, Use firm circular movements with the tip of your thumb.

## 3) Percussion Tapping

You can perform this exercise as many times as possible during the day.

- Tap rapidly and lightly (2 to 3 taps per second) on a tender area, you can do this with your fingertip or pencil
- Tap for one minute or until you notice a change in the sensation of the area
- Rest and repeat on all tender areas



## Contact Us

**If you have any problems or concerns, please contact your therapist on:**

Doncaster Royal Infirmary, Tel: 01302 644210

Bassetlaw Hospital, Tel: 01909 572302

Montagu Hospital, Tel: 01709 649190

Retford Hospital, Tel: 01777 863400.

## Patient Experience Team

The team are available to help with any concerns, complaints or questions you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

### The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: [dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net](mailto:dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net)

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