

Caring for your CO2 laser resurfacing wound

Dr Saqib Bashir

Introduction

There is no single best way to care for a laser wound, although research and technology allow us to advise and modify wound care for individual patients. The advice given in this leaflet represents the ideal care for a laser resurfacing/laser ablation of skin, to provide optimum healing and minimal scarring. Your care plan may be tailored to your individual circumstances.

Immediate post operative care

The treated area is usually dressed with an ointment, although for smaller areas a dressing or plaster may also be applied. Large areas are simply dressed with an occlusive ointment. Skin treated with a CO2 laser tends to lose moisture very quickly and become dry and scaly in days following treatment. It's therefore important to keep the skin well moisturized.

Throughout the day...

It is essential that you keep the area well moisturized with an ointment-based moisturiser, such as 50/50 White Soft Paraffin. This will need to be applied every 1 – 2 hours as needed, as the skin becomes dry and tight very easily. This keeps the area well moisturized, until the skin barrier begins to recover after lasering. Overnight, after washing, apply a generous amount to help keep the skin moist overnight. This period of intense moisturizing lasts 4 – 7 days on average, depending on the depth/power of the laser treatment.

After the initial phase of shedding and redness is over, you can use a lighter moisturizer or an after laser cream and a sunscreen to help protect the skin.

Avoiding strong sunlight

This is very important to protect your skin after CO2 laser resurfacing. In the days immediately after treatment, you will be using 50/50 white soft paraffin on the skin, so it won't be possible to apply a sunscreen as well. Therefore, you should keep in the shade and, if you have had a facial treatment, use a wide brimmed hat to prevent direct sun shining on the face.

After about 4 – 7 days, when the initial shedding is over, you can apply a sunscreen – usually SPF50 and a post laser gel to help the skin settle.

Washing the wound

Washing well is very important. You should not be afraid to touch or wash the laser treated area. Under washing allows the ointments and scale to build on the skin and delays healing.

You should wash the wound as follows:

- Remove any dressings gently: if stuck, don't pull - soak it off with water
- Have a normal shower (or bath) allowing the wound to get wet
- Allow plenty of water to run onto the wound
- Wash off any blood clots, ointment residue and scale that are easy to lift.
- Do not scrub the wound
- Do not lift scales that are stuck on to the skin – they will come off in their own time
- Use plain water, or, if prescribed, a prescribed cleanser (Dermol 500, Cetaphil or La Roche Posay
- Avoid tcp/dettol or savlon or similar products
- Dry the skin gently with clean towel
- Redress the wound as described below

Dressing the wound

Once the wound has been washed, it can be dressed again.

. Ointment dressings

Large area laser wounds, or awkward wounds such as the scalp, eyelids or genitals may simply have an ointment as a dressing. This should be applied several times daily to prevent the wound from drying up. Either use 50/50 WSP or a prescribed ointment.

In the first few days after lasering, a liquefied ointment such as 50/50 WSP or Aquaphor should be used. After the dryness and scaling is settling, a sunscreen followed by an after laser cream such as Cicaplast should be used. Keep topping up the moisturizer throughout the day.

B. Simple dressings

Small area laser wounds can a simple dressing consisting of a layer of Vaseline or prescribed ointment, and then a plaster with an absorbent pad applied on top. Dr Bashir will tell you how often to change your dressings. In most cases a simple plaster will suffice, unless you have been instructed otherwise.

This process of washing and dressing the wound should be repeated daily until the wound has healed or the sutures have been removed

What to expect...

Your wound will initially be red, and then become swollen over a period of a few hours after the biopsy. This swelling may take about 2-4 weeks to settle. Wounds which are well looked after and covered with a dressing tend to be less red and swollen.

Excessively wet wounds, which are red and painful or yellow with pus, may indicate infection and should be assessed by Dr Bashir's team or a healthcare professional. Healing of CO2 laser wounds is usually excellent but may require specialist supervision. Please call if you are at all uncertain regarding your treatment and wound care.

Contact details

To speak to the nurses or Dr Bashir regarding your wound, please call the clinic at which you were treated, or Dr Bashir's secretary. They are always happy to hear from you and will be able to give you initial advice and contact Dr Bashir on your behalf. Out of hours, or in an emergency, please call NHS Direct or your GP for advice, if you cannot reach our team.

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