Skin Graft and Donor Site Care
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You may need a skin graft for:
› Leg ulcers.
› A wound on your body that does not heal.
› A burn wound.

Surgery
In the operating room (OR), a thin layer of skin will be taken off one area of your body and attached to the area where there is no skin. The area where the skin is attached is called the graft site. Staples are used to hold the skin in place. The area where the skin is removed is called the donor site. The donor site is usually your thigh but other areas can be used. Your doctor will talk about this with you.

If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.
After surgery

• You will have an intravenous (IV) until you are eating and drinking well. You should eat healthy foods. Good nutrition is very important for healing.

• You will be able to have medication for pain. Please tell your nurse when you need pain medication. Please see the patient pamphlet *Managing Pain After Surgery* for more information.

• Bed rest is needed for 5 days. This is so that your graft will not be disturbed. You will need to keep the grafted area still so that it will heal. Your nurse will help you with personal hygiene.

• You must not smoke. Smoking lowers the ability of the graft to heal.

• You will have a graft site dressing and a donor site dressing. Your nurse will check these dressings for appearance and drainage.
Graft site dressing care

Your graft site will be covered with a bulky dressing. If your graft site is on your arm or leg, you will have a plaster slab covered by a bulky dressing. The plaster slab supports your arm or leg and helps you keep it still. If your graft site is on your arm or leg, your arm or leg will be raised on 2 pillows. This is so that blood does not pool in your fingers or toes and cause swelling. At first, your nurse will check your fingers or toes for:

- Colour (to make sure they are pink)
- Temperature (to make sure they are warm)
- Sensation (to make sure that you have feeling in them)
- Movement (to make sure that you can wiggle them if your dressing allows).

Your graft site dressing will be on for 5 days. After 5 days, your doctor will remove the dressing. Your nurse will give you pain medication before your dressing is removed. Your doctor will then tell you if you can increase your activity. This will depend on how healthy the graft looks.

Your doctor will then order dressing changes to be done every day or every second day. Your nurse will change your dressing. Your graft will be cleaned with normal saline (salt water) and covered with Jelonet (a type of dressing) and gauze.
Donor site dressing care

Allevyn (hydrocellular foam dressing)
This dressing can absorb large volumes of drainage. It can be left in place for up to 7 days depending on the amount of drainage.

Sometimes it is necessary to take off your donor site dressing before your donor site is healed. This can happen if your nurse or doctor notices a cloudy drainage or bad smell. If your donor site dressing is taken off before it is healed, your doctor will decide what dressing is best for you.

Once your donor and graft sites are healed
Your nurse will apply lanolin (lotion) to your healed donor and graft sites 2-3 times a day. If you are allergic to wool, you should not use lanolin. You may use regular unscented moisture lotion. This keeps your skin soft and prevents dryness.

Once you are allowed up
If your graft or donor site is on your leg, you must have ACE™ bandages put on before you get up. These bandages keep blood from pooling in your feet and lower legs. Your nurse will put these bandages on for you.
Your nurse will teach you how to put on the ACE™ bandages. They may be taken off when you are in bed or sitting in a chair with your legs raised. If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

**Going home**

Your doctor will talk with you about your activity level. If your graft and donor sites are healed, apply lanolin or lotion as told by your nurse or doctor.

If your graft and/or donor site is not healed, your nurse will teach you how to do your dressing change or help arrange for a nurse to do your dressing change for you at home.

If your graft or donor site is on your leg, remember to put on ACE™ bandages before you get up in the morning.

Do not expose your graft or donor site to the sun. Newly healed skin is very sensitive to the sun. If you cannot avoid the sun, make sure that you use sunscreen.

You will get a prescription for pain medication if needed. You will be given an appointment to come back to the clinic for a check-up.
Key terms

Skin graft
A thin layer of skin that is taken off one area of your body and attached to an area where there is no skin.

Donor site
The area where the skin is taken off.

Intravenous (IV)
A plastic catheter (tube) placed in a vein through which you get fluid or medication.

Dressing
A covering placed over your wound to prevent infection.

Plaster slab
A splint made out of plaster.

Normal saline
A sterile salt and water solution used to clean wounds.

Jelonet
A thin gauze dressing coated with a soft paraffin base so that it does not stick to skin.

ACE Bandages™
Special elastic wraps that are put on your legs to prevent swelling in your feet and lower legs.
Call your doctor if you have:

› Pain that is getting worse.
› Swelling.
› Bad smell from donor or graft site.
› Yellow or green drainage from donor or graft site.
› Fever or chills.