Care of the healed graft and donor site

After the area is healed you will be asked to massage and moisturise the graft and the donor site with a non-perfumed sorbolene cream 3-4 times a day. This is because the sweat glands have been damaged during the injury and you will need to replace moisture to the area regularly, otherwise the wound may breakdown and further scarring can occur.

It is vital that you protect both areas from the sun for at least 12 months after surgery. If you are going out into the sun please use 30+ SPF sunscreen, sun protective clothing and a hat.

If you required a skin graft due to a burn then you will be seen by the Occupational Therapist and they will discuss options for scar management such as the use of pressure garments and topical silicone products. They will also explain and further encourage you to continue with massage and moisturiser. It is important that you follow the instructions given to you by the Occupational Therapist about how to use and care for these products.

Going Home

You may require dressings after discharge to the graft and/or donor site. This may occur in the Burns or Plastics Clinic or by your GP or Community Health Nurse. The options will be discussed with you.

You will then be followed up as an outpatient in the Burns or Plastics clinic.

Contact Details

☐ Royal Hobart Hospital Burns Outpatient Clinic
   Level 12, Wellington Clinics, Argyle Street
   Business Hours:
   Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
   Telephone: 6166 0098
   Faxed: 6234 9636
   Wednesdays, Weekends, Public Holidays and after hours contact
   Tasmanian Burns Unit
   Surgical Specialities
   K9 East
   Telephone: 6166 8566
   (this service is also available 24hrs/day for advice)
   Fax: 6234 9636

☐ Launceston General Plastics Department
   Specialist Clinics LGH
   Telephone: 1300 977 694

Tasmanian Health Service (THS)
The THS integrates acute, primary and community services. This integration has given service providers the flexibility to ensure people have the best services we can provide, as close as possible to where they live.

The THS includes Tasmania’s largest hospital and referral centre plus a range of rural hospitals, multi-purpose and community health centres, supported by a wide range of community based services.

THS welcomes feedback from patients and visitors to help us better understand your needs and improve care. Contact the Consumer Liaison Service, telephone 1800 811 911.

THS buildings are smoke-free sites.
What is a skin graft?
A skin graft is a common surgical procedure where a section of skin of variable thickness is removed from an uninjured area (called the donor site) such as your upper thigh and placed on the site of the injury.

The skin may be removed from other areas of the body. This will be discussed with you prior to the surgery.

The graft will be secured by either sutures or staples and will be covered with a dressing for 3-6 days.

Why might you need a skin graft?
A skin graft may be required if the wound is too large to be directly closed, it may hasten healing, prevent infection, improve physical functioning, and be used for cosmetic reasons.

Types of Skin Grafts
Meshed or sheet grafts are used to cover the site of the injury. Meshed grafts are made by passing the donor skin through a machine that cuts small holes in the skin in a meshed pattern. This type of graft is used to expand the surface area of the skin and allows any fluid build up to pass through the graft, increasing the probability of graft ‘take’. A sheet graft is often used on the face and hands.

The surgeon will discuss the type of graft that is suitable for your individual case prior to surgery.

Care of the Donor site
A donor site is the area where the surgeon has taken a layer of skin to create a graft. Only a fine layer of skin has been taken, so healing should take 7 – 21 days. However this may vary depending on the size, area and depth and also your age and medical history.

The nurse will inform you when the dressing will be removed and how to care for the site.

Care of the skin graft
The dressing will stay in place for 3-6 days after surgery. It is important that you follow the instructions given to you by the nursing and medical staff during this period.

If the graft is on a limb you may be required to elevate the arm or leg and rest in bed. This will help reduce swelling and pain and will help the graft ‘take’ to the new site. This may be required after the initial dressing is removed depending on the appearance of the graft.

It is important that you eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids, avoiding caffeinated drinks during this period of time.

It is important that you stop smoking.

A splint may be needed to immobilise (stop) movement of the grafted area if it is over a joint. Splints need to be kept in place 24hrs a day until you are advised that they can be removed. They may need to be worn after the dressing is removed. You will be advised about this and an exercise regime by the physiotherapist on day 4-6 after surgery.

Prior to a dressing being removed you will be given some analgesia (pain relief). Your dressing may need to be replaced.