



**Disclaimer:** This leaflet provides general information and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional for any health concerns or before making any decisions related to your health or treatment.

### Overview

A keloid scar is a raised, overgrown scar that develops after a skin injury. It extends beyond the original wound boundary and can be larger than the initial injury. Unlike typical scars, keloids don't fade or flatten over time and can sometimes be itchy or painful. They can appear anywhere on the body but are more common on the chest, shoulders, back, earlobes, and cheeks. People with darker skin tones are more prone to keloids.



### Symptoms and Causes

Keloids are:

- Raised, thick, and lumpy.
- Pink, red, purple, or brown in colour, often darker than the surrounding skin.
- Shiny and smooth.
- Itchy or painful, especially during growth.
- Can restrict movement if located over a joint.

The exact cause of keloids is unknown, but they occur due to excessive collagen production during wound healing. Factors that can increase the risk of developing keloids include:

- Genetics: Keloids can run in families.
- Skin colour: Darker skin tones are more susceptible.
- Location of injury: Certain areas, like the earlobes and chest, are more prone.
- Wound tension: Areas with high skin tension during healing, such as over joints, are more likely to develop keloids.
- Inflammation or infection in the initial wound.

### Diagnosis and Investigations

Diagnosis is usually made by clinical examination. Your doctor will assess the scar's appearance, size, location, and growth pattern. In some cases, an ultrasound scan and a biopsy may be performed to confirm the diagnosis and rule out other skin conditions.

### Management and Treatment

There is no single cure for keloids, and treatment aims to flatten the scar, reduce symptoms, and improve cosmetic appearance. Treatment options vary and may involve a combination of approaches.

- **Corticosteroid injections:** These are the most common treatment, injected directly into the keloid to reduce inflammation and shrink the scar. Triamcinolone acetonide is typically used, and multiple injections may be needed over several months. These are only available by prescription.
- **Silicone gel or sheets:** Available over-the-counter (OTC) at pharmacies, these are applied directly to the keloid to help flatten and soften the scar. They are generally used for several months.
- **Pressure therapy:** Applying continuous pressure to the keloid using special garments or dressings can help reduce its size and growth. These require fitting and instruction from a specialist.

- **Cryotherapy:** Freezing the keloid with liquid nitrogen can be effective, particularly for smaller keloids. This is performed by a dermatologist.
- **Laser therapy:** Different types of lasers can be used to target the blood vessels within the keloid, helping to reduce redness and flatten the scar. This is performed by a dermatologist.
- **Surgery:** Surgical removal is generally avoided as it carries a high risk of keloid recurrence. It may be considered in combination with other treatments, such as steroid injections or radiotherapy, to reduce the risk of regrowth.
- **Other medications:** Less commonly used options include 5-fluorouracil injections, bleomycin injections, verapamil gel, imiquimod cream and interferon therapy. These are prescription-only medicines and will require careful consideration and discussion with your dermatologist.

## Prevention

If you are prone to keloids or have a family history, take precautions to minimise skin injury and prevent keloid formation:

- Avoid unnecessary piercings, tattoos, and cosmetic procedures.
- Treat acne and other skin conditions promptly to reduce inflammation and scarring.
- If surgery is necessary, discuss preventive measures with your surgeon, such as specific suturing techniques and silicone dressings after the procedure.
- Protect skin from excessive sun exposure, which can darken scars.

## Outlook/Prognosis

Keloids are benign and don't pose any serious health risks. However, they can be a cosmetic concern and may cause discomfort. Treatment can improve the appearance and symptoms but doesn't guarantee complete removal. Keloids can recur even after successful treatment. It's important to have realistic expectations and to discuss the potential benefits and limitations of each treatment option with your doctor.