

# Carolina Skin Surgery Center Monthly Newsletter

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## Scar Wars

By: Marc Carruth, M.D.

One of the most concerning aspects of undergoing surgery for patients is the problem of scarring. I have found that being armed with knowledge of a subject can be an ally in the war against fears and anxieties related to it. If you agree with this philosophy, then read on. Otherwise, you may want to skip to our word search.

A scar is a mark on the skin that may be perceived as a change in color, texture, or contour. Scars may be raised or depressed (dented in/scooped out) in relation to the "normal" surrounding skin. Scars are permanent changes in the skin that may form after an injury such as a cut, scrape, burn or surgical procedure. Anything that cuts beneath the top layer of skin (the epidermis) into the next layer where blood vessels and collagen are located (the dermis) may lead to scarring.

Scars and their appearance can vary depending on your age, skin color, skin type, injury type and genetic factors. The way you scar can even be different based on body location and can vary at different times of your life. For instance, younger individuals and active people may have a greater likelihood of "spread scars". This type of scar starts out as a narrow line, but widens as the skin stretches over the first 6 months after the surgery. It is most common in areas of high mobility such as the back, shoulders, chest and joints. Sometimes the center of the scar can be atrophic (thinner) than the surrounding normal skin.

Over time, scars become less visible and there are techniques to minimize a scar's appearance. The goal for a surgical scar is to result in a fine white line around 6 to 8 months after the surgery. The scar is still present, but less visible. Scars typically improve in appearance over the course of 2 years. The majority of the improvement occurs in the first 6 to 8 months. At first, the scar can be firm and have color irregularities but after 6 to 8 months it should become much softer and more pliable as the body "chews" up the underlying stitches and remodels the collagen. The color may be red at first, but this also usually fades over time in most cases.

Improvement techniques for scars include massage, and protection from the sun. Massage can be accomplished by rubbing one to several fingers over the scar for 45 -60 seconds three to four times a day for 2 months. You can massage the area with no lotion, your favorite moisturizer, or an over-the-counter scar remedy such as Mederma. Studies show these may provide a modest benefit. It is recommended that you avoid vitamin E oil, especially directly out of the capsules, as some studies have actually shown a worse result and even rashes or irritation. Protection from the sun is important in the first 4 months especially when the wound is red. The sun can cause unwanted color changes in the scar and lead to a less

acceptable result. Sunscreens, clothing, and hats are helpful in protecting the scar depending on its location. A sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher is recommended and a bandage, piece of tape or other opaque covering would be best as sunscreens do not block out all of the sun.

If scars do not improve after waiting 6 months to a year and trying the techniques noted above, then a scar revision may be helpful. This involves cutting out the old scar and “re-stitching” it in an effort to create a less noticeable line. Other options for scar improvement include treating it with a laser. There are different types of lasers that can be used depending on the perceived problem (i.e. color, texture or contour abnormality). Finally, a technique known as dermabrasion (sanding the skin) can be used to “buff” out and improve texture irregularities.

Nobody likes scars or wants to have one, but they are unfortunately a natural occurrence of surgical procedures. Approaching them with a better understanding of the types of scars, why they occur and how to achieve the best possible outcome can help reduce anxiety and provide an advantage in the war on scars.

## CSSC Word Search

F Y Q N H B Y X F Z D I L H Z  
R X F C A T H Y T U E D J G R  
W U J S S P Y E Y N R Z Y L L  
U N D E R S T A N D M I R Q F  
M N Y T G H C R G C A W A K A  
W O P Z N S O Y L V B E U X X  
R I P Q L H S O O D R N R W Y  
D T A G B O M K V A A U B M K  
N C H Q V M E P E M S S E G T  
E E V S Z B T Z U T I F F Y R  
C T R W R J I K L U O A E F K  
R O E Q Q A C D L S N J Q F R  
Z R T G M L E N M K I H W A E  
C P X U J X C Y T N D A C A V  
V Q M A S S A G E U F S I I K

SCAR  
MASSAGE  
SUN  
PROTECTION  
DERMABRASION  
COSMETIC  
CATHY  
UNDERSTAND  
FEBRUARY  
MOHS  
HAPPY  
NEW  
YEAR

### *Employee Spotlight for February is Cathy!*

Let's get to know Cathy:

Favorite color: pink

Hobby: physical fitness

Favorite food: pizza

When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up? Secretary

# CAROLINA SKIN SURGERY CENTER

*"Specializing in the treatment of skin cancer"*

## About Dr. Carruth:

Dr. Marc R. Carruth is the Director of Carolina Skin Surgery Center. Dr. Carruth received his M.D. degree from Duke University where he graduated with highest honors in 1993 and was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society. He was awarded a Howard Hughes Medical Institute fellowship at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Carruth completed his internship in Internal Medicine at Harvard, Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts and a Dermatology residency at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia where he was chief resident. Dr. Carruth completed his Mohs Micrographic and Dermatologic Surgery fellowship at Baptist Hospital in Kansas City, MO.

Dr. Carruth is known for his personable bedside manner and has been providing excellent care to patients in the Charlotte region since 1997. He has performed thousands of Mohs micrographic procedures during his tenure.

## About Lisa Matuga, PA-C:

Lisa has been a Physician Assistant for over 6 years and has been providing excellent dermatologic care in the Charlotte area for over three years.

Lisa received her Master of Science in Medicine and graduated from the Physician Assistant Program at Western Michigan University in 2008. She has a passion for helping patients with their dermatological needs and we are very excited to have her as a part of our team.

## Meet the Staff:

Receptionist: Sandy - She always has a smile on her face and is willing to help with anything. Sandy has been with Dr. Carruth since April of 2010.

Billing: Cathy – Understanding health insurance can be overwhelming, but Cathy is always willing to call and verify benefits and then explain them to you as simply as possible. Cathy has been with Dr. Carruth since December of 2008.

Surgery Coordinator/Medical Assistant: Ashley – She assists Dr. Carruth and Lisa Matuga, PA-C with procedures and also handles the surgery scheduling. If you have had Mohs surgery then you have probably spoken with her! Ashley has been with Dr. Carruth since May of 2011.

Lab Technician / Medical Assistant: Tara – She is the one who processes the tissue for Dr. Carruth to review under the microscope (Mohs surgery). She also assists Dr. Carruth and Lisa with procedures. She has been with Dr. Carruth since September of 2007.

Registered Medical Assistant/Lab Technician: Jackie – She assists Dr. Carruth and Lisa with procedures and also helps process the tissue in the lab. Jackie has been with Dr. Carruth since October of 2008.

Certified Surgical Technician: Cynthia – She assists Dr. Carruth and Lisa with procedures and has been with Dr. Carruth since September of 2009.

Medical Assistant / Surgery Coordinator: Chiffon – our newest member! Chiffon started with us in March of 2014. Chiffon is assisting Lisa Matuga, PA-C with patients and handles surgery scheduling. We are happy to have her on our team.

Office Manager: April has been with Dr. Carruth since August of 2006. Please let her know if you have any suggestions or comments – we encourage feedback and are always willing to learn.

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