

## "THE BODY REMEMBERS" :

### *Alleviating the Long-Term Impact of Injury with Japanese Scar Therapy*

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#### Introduction

Scars are the causes of prolonged effects that an injury continues to have on the body. Despite the outward appearance of healing, patients continue to suffer from the residual impact of scar tissue formation long after the initial trauma, and experience chronic pain and disability, both physical and psychological. They find little relief from conventional treatments.

Japanese scar therapy has a well-established tradition of effectively treating scars; it lessens pain, regenerates the nerves and tissues, and dissolves the adhesions that encroach upon organs, tissues and muscles. Acupuncture needling increases circulation and facilitates greater nutrition and oxygenation of the cells in the affected area.

Scars develop during the natural biological processes of wound repair; they are composed of collagen, but the constituents of the fibers that form within the scar are different. Instead of the basket-weave formation of normal, soluble fibrinogen, scar tissue contains insoluble strands of fibrin that are less functional. As a result, the skin becomes inflexible and often sweat glands and hair follicles do not reappear in that area.

#### *Types of Scars*

##### Hypertrophic

Over-expression of, or excess, collagen is characteristic of hypertrophic and keloid scars. Both of these scar types are comprised of excessively stiff collagen bundles that inhibit the regeneration of healthy tissue.

A hypertrophic scar is elevated above the surface of the skin, and forms in direct proportion to the size of the wound. The excessive collagen gives rise to a raised scar. This type of scar develops at the site of pimples, piercings, cuts, and burns, and often contains nerves and blood vessels.

Hypertrophic scars generally are seen after a burn, surgery or other traumatic injury that impacts the dermal layer of the skin. A keloid scar is similar to a hypertrophic scar, but it extends beyond the boundaries of the original wound.

##### Atrophic

Atrophic scarring occurs due to the under-expression of collagen, and generally manifests as a sunken area, which can be characterized as "kyo", a Japanese shiatsu term meaning an empty, deficient space in the tissue. I would describe it as a "valley" - recessed and yin.

Conversely, hypertrophic and keloid scars are "jitsu", referring to the overproduction of collagen in the tissues. They are excess and yang, mirroring the "mountains" which surround the valley.

Hypertrophic scars are hereditary in nature, and present as red, raised lumps on the skin, and generally appear about 4- to 8 weeks after the injury. Japanese scar therapy can help to alleviate the condition of the scar, flattening it out, and causing it to appear less red and inflamed.

Keloid scars are composed of Type III collagen, which is more inflexible than Type I. Keloids are firm, rubbery lesions or shiny, fibrous nodules, which vary in color from pink to red or dark brown

in color. While they may have the appearance of tumors, they are nevertheless benign and non-contagious.

Keloids may also be itchy and painful, and impede movement of the skin; they are 15 times more prevalent in individuals with dark skin. If they become infected, they can form ulcerations; the collagen overgrows the wound area and produces lumps.

Atrophic, "sunken" scarring is characterized by depressions in the skin, the result of collagen bundles that do not overextend the tissue. For example, stretch marks, *striae*, can be regarded as atrophic, and occur when the skin is stretched in a comparatively short period of time, as during pregnancy, periods of excess weight gain or loss, or adolescent growth spurts.

A pitted appearance in the skin is due to the atrophy of underlying structures like fat or muscle; this phenomenon is associated with acne, chicken pox, surgery, accidents, or stretch marks.

Physiological factors affecting healing: "prolonged trauma"

- age;
- nutrition;
- clotting tendencies;
- tissue regeneration;
- strength of immune system;
- emotional and environmental stress

Imbalances:

- A combination of non-elastic tissue, insufficient blood supply, & oxygen/nutrient deprivation to the affected area can cause adhesions;
- Localized adhesions pull on the surrounding tissues and can affect digestion, circulation and respiration;
- The functioning of muscles and organs in the area can become impaired; the scar serves as an ongoing source of irritation to the body, and a reminder of the initial damage;
- By needling the scar, one can break up scar tissue, increase circulation, oxygenate and improve cell nutrition;
- Scar adhesions pull on muscles and organs, compromising the body's functioning;
- Adhesions cause stress and make the body aware of previous traumas, surgery, accidents or damage;
- Scars do not change after 10 days; begin with treatments after 10 days. Do not treat them if they are infected or ulcerated;
- Cellular memory: in treating adhesions, the patient may remember the trauma associated with the formation of the scar;
- This remembrance may cause an emotional release;
- According to Kiiko Matsumoto and her senseis, If the scar or old injury has not completely healed, the adhesions will contribute to the appearance of secondary symptoms, ones that would seem unrelated to the original injury or area of surgical intervention; for example:

TYPE OF SCAR	SECONDARY SYMPTOMS
Hysterectomy; Dantien disturbance, Ren/Chong Mai, plus Kidney meridian disturbances	sciatica gas spasms of the ileocecal valve constipation sensation of constant bladder infection incontinence ache in the lower back (quadratus lumborum muscle)

### Scar Treatment:

- Note the color of the scar;
- Palpate cross-fiber over the scar; feel for both raised areas (jitsu) and indented areas (kyo) within the scar;
- Palpate and find the edges or terminators of the scar;
- Please ask your patients for feedback regarding the following: is the scar, numb, tingly, painful or uncomfortable to the touch?;
- First, needle the two terminations of the scar, horizontally and superficially, from each end toward the center. Needle just under the scar to break up the adhesions;
- Then, needle directly under the scar, cross-fiber, where you detected the raised (jitsu) or indented (kyo) areas;
- Needle only in the location where the adhesions seemed the most prominent;
- Continue these scar treatments every week, integrating them into your patient's treatment protocol;
- The time required for scar therapy treatments depends upon the age of the scar;
  - Old scars will respond gradually to the acupuncture needling; for example, with a 25-year old hysterectomy scar, you may have to wait 6 months to a year to observe noticeable results
    - You will know that the treatments are working because the adhesions will smooth out, the residual numbness, and the secondary symptoms, such as incontinence, will be relieved or lessened;
  - A new scar, 11 days old, caused by the removal of a skin cancer, melanoma, from the face, should respond within one month, if the patient is healthy;



Figure 1. Ankle surgery: scar needling increased circulation and oxygenation of the tissues

- Use longer and thicker gauge needles for abdominal scars and smaller, thinner gauge, needles for the face;
  - Note that upper lip lines can relate to abdominal scarring;

Horizontal lines on the upper lip are often associated with a hysterectomy performed during the child-bearing years, due to the presence of fibroids, endometriosis or uterine cancer.<sup>1</sup>

This line can also indicate a Caesarian section, sterility in both men and women, a head trauma, or scarring of the uterus by an intrauterine device (IUD).

The upper lip relates to the sexual organs, according to Chinese physiognomy. I usually ask to examine the abdominal scar that has resulted from the Caesarian section or hysterectomy. I then use Japanese scar therapy distally to release the adhesions, instead of needling the sensitive area on the upper lip. In needling the abdominal scar, the upper lip line becomes very red and full of fresh blood and Qi circulation. There are several benefits that can be achieved in treating the abdominal scar:

1. The upper lip is sensitive, and needling it locally will cause the patient some discomfort.
2. Needling the abdomen affects the upper lip and sexual organs, and treats the cause, rather than the symptom.
3. Some scars are horizontal, just above the pubic bone, and others are vertical, lying along the Ren Mai meridian, which disturbs its flow. Needling these abdominal scars breaks up adhesions, and will help to reestablish the free flow of Qi in the meridians. For example, a horizontal scar above the pubic bone blocks not only the Ren Mai, but also the Kidney, Stomach and Spleen meridians, and will cause constitutional imbalances.
4. An untreated scar in this area will cause secondary problems because the adhesions pull on the organs, muscles and tissues. For example, a horizontal scar can pull on the Bladder, causing frequent urination, a constant feeling of fullness and incontinence. By needling this area, the symptoms will cease in time.

It is important to note that by treating an abdominal scar distally, you can evoke constitutional shifts, and that the associated horizontal upper lip line should fade within the course of treatments.

When teaching a seminar some years ago, I noticed a small circle above the right side of a student's upper lip. When I asked her if she had an abdominal scar, she showed me a circular incision on the same side, from a recent tubal ligation. When I treated the scar by Surrounding the Dragon with small intradermal needles, the circle on the upper lip turned bright red, mirroring the increased circulation in the abdominal area. Several months later, the scar on her upper lip had vanished.

Recommended treatment modalities:

- Acupuncture
- Myofascial release
- Qi gong
- Tuning forks (vibrated on the scar to break up adhesions)

- Cupping
- Moxa: pole moxa, Tiger warmer; thread moxa for old scars
- Mustard and castor oil packs; for old scars
- Internal scarring: nattokinase (fermented soybean), and silkworm extract
- Topicals: vitamin E, scar oil, Biosil for scars and stretch marks; silicon sheeting over large scars
- Homeopathic: Silica 30C; tissue salts: Calc P
- Visualization

#### Conclusion:

Our skin is a vulnerable, surprisingly resilient, organ, and yet it retains the memory of the wounds that we have suffered, both on a physical and psychospiritual level.

It plays many roles in our lives, and is remarkably intelligent and versatile. This permeable sheath selectively keeps some things in and some things out of the body. For example, it protects us from the environment and shields the internal organs from external pathogenic influences, such as: ultraviolet rays, attacks from chemical, microbial, or other physical agents. It also regulates blood pressure and cools body temperature, while detoxifying the system via the evaporation of sweat.

Our skin is constantly evolving, as new cells die and others form. It telegraphs information about us to others - our state of health, age, ancestry, genetics, sex, habits - our balances and imbalances.

The skin ages, scars, has birthmarks, piercings, wrinkles, warts, moles - and yet it rarely fails us. It is a brilliantly designed organ that is constantly being renewed and transformed.

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#### Bio:



Mary Elizabeth Wakefield, L. Ac., M. S., M. M., author of *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture* (2014, Churchill Livingstone Elsevier) is internationally acknowledged as the leading authority on facial acupuncture. An author, educator, and creator of innovative treatment protocols, she has presented at symposiums in North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia, and trained approximately 4,500 practitioners in seminars on 5 continents. She recently created and taught a 2-year training program at Northwestern Health Sciences University, the International GOLD STANDARD FACIAL ACUPUNCTURE® Certification Program, which raises the bar of excellence in this field. This master's level immersion in facial acupuncture, the first of its kind in the world, will be presented a second time in 2015-2016. Mary Elizabeth maintains a private practice in New York City; [www.chiakra.com](http://www.chiakra.com); [chi.akra@gmail.com](mailto:chi.akra@gmail.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Wakefield, Mary Elizabeth, *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture*, Elsevier, UK, 2014, pp. 225-226.