

INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PARENTS / CARERS

SPLIT SKIN GRAFT



WHAT IS A Split Skin Graft?

A Split Skin Graft is a thin shaving of normal healthy skin used to cover an area of damaged skin that cannot heal or is very slow to heal following an injury (e.g. a burn) or removal of an abnormality (e.g. a skin lesion).

The healthy skin used for the Split Skin Graft, is usually taken from an area on the body that is not directly beside the injured or abnormal skin.

In the Children's Hospital Ireland (CHI) it is **usually** taken from your child's thigh.

It contains a portion of the top layer of skin (the epidermis) and some of the underlying layers (the dermis). It does not usually involve hair follicles or sweat glands.

The healthy skin is placed over the damaged area and attached to the adjoining skin with absorbable sutures (stiches) or a special glue.

This allows the wound to heal.

WHY DOES MY CHILD NEED A SPLIT SKIN GRAFT?

Your child's wound may not heal properly if the skin has been badly damaged and so a Split Skin Graft maybe necessary to help heal the wound.

Or if your child needs removal of a lesion (e.g. Birthmark or scar) a Split Skin Graft may be recommended to facilitate wound closure.

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH A SPLIT SKIN GRAFT

A Split Skin Graft is performed by the plastic surgeon in the operating room.

Your child will require a general anaesthetic (he/she will be put asleep) for this procedure. They will not feel any pain.



DURING THE OPERATION

- The damaged skin or lesion is removed and the area cleaned.
- The Split Skin Graft is taken from an area of healthy skin. This area is called the donor site.
- It is either meshed or unmeshed.
- Meshing requires passing the Split Skin Graft through a special machine that puts holes in the Split Skin Graft.
- This enables the Split Skin Graft to be stretched so a larger injured area can be covered using a smaller piece of healthy skin.
- Usually when the injured area is smaller the Split Skin Graft is left unmeshed.
- Once the Split Skin Graft is placed over the injured area it is held in place by absorbable sutures or glue.
- This area is called the graft site.
- Dressings are then applied to both the donor and graft sites.

AFTER THE OPERATION

To keep your child comfortable they will receive pain relief medicine and fluids. This maybe orally (by mouth) or through a drip (their "Freddie") going into a vein.

To protect the graft until it heals your child may need to be kept on bed rest, wear a splint or cast, or an older child may be allowed to use crutches.

Recovery after a Split Skin Graft is usually quick.

The length of stay in hospital varies depending on the amount of grafting required, the location grafted and how well your child tolerates their dressing changes.

In CHI children usually remain in hospital until the first change of the graft site dressing which is generally performed on day 5 post surgery. The doctors and nurses looking after your child will decide if it is suitable for your child to go home.

The donor site dressing is generally left in place (not changed) for 10 days to allow the wound to heal.

When your child is been discharged home, they will receive an appointment to attend St Annes dressing clinic where their dressings will be changed and the Burns and Plastic Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNSp) will check how well the Split Skin Graft and donor sites are healing. If needed the CNSp will link your child in with Physiotherapist or Occupational therapist.

CARE AT HOME

You will need to contact the hospital if your child develops:

- bleeding
- bad smell from under dressing
- high temperature
- increase in pain
- is unwell (vomiting or diarrhoea, off food/drink, rash, not passing urine)



Your child could become very unwell quickly so seek prompt advice if you are concerned at all from your local services who will contact the Plastics Team in CHI @ Crumlin.

DRESSING CARE AT HOME

Dressings have been applied to protect the Split Skin Graft and donor site. Please leave the bandages in place until you return to the hospital for your follow up appointment.

You will need to ring the clinic if any of the following things happen before your clinic appointment:

- The bandage becomes loose, falls off or the wound is exposed.
- The bandage is too tight or your child starts to complain that the dressing is hurting them.
- The bandage becomes wet or the wound fluid leaks through the dressing wetting their outer clothing or bedlinen.
- Your child has pain that is not relieved by paracetamol or a sudden onset of pain for no apparent reason i.e. a fall.
- The bandage becomes smelly or looks green.



Points to Remember

You may need to restrict your child's activity levels to protect the Split Skin Graft and donor site from trauma (*bumps and knocks*).

Give your child all medication as prescribed by the team. Please ensure you give regular pain relief particularly prior to dressing changes.

Attend all follow-up appointments given on discharge.

CONTACT US

- For more information on **Split Skin Graft**, please contact St. Anne's Dressing clinic.
- Phone: **01 409 6496** and ask to speak with the Clinical Nurse Specialist or leave a message for them to call you back

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