



## **BOULDER PLASTIC SURGERY Prof., L.L.C.**

**Hans R. Kuisle, M.D.**

**Winfield Hartley, M.D**

**2525 4th Street #202, Boulder, CO 80304**

**303.443.2277 303.443.7124 fax**

**[www.boulderplasticsurgery.com](http://www.boulderplasticsurgery.com)**

## **POSTOPERATIVE HEALING**

Postoperative healing requires some mandatory down time as part of the surgical recovery process. Post surgical healing requires the body to repair the surgical wound (whether in the skin, fat, muscle or bone) with scar tissue. The bruise and tissue fluid in the wound are gradually replaced by stronger scar or fibrous tissue over a period of 6-8 weeks. Until the time that the healing area is strong enough to maintain tissue integrity, the wound is held together by the sutures (stitches) placed at the time of surgery. Too much wound tension (stress) before the strength of the healing tissue is satisfactory, can cause disruption of the incision. I place sutures very precisely to account for these healing characteristics to maximize your postoperative activity, comfort, and safety. However, your inherent healing characteristics significantly dictate these parameters. Stretching, movement, massage, and return to normal activities of daily living in the early postoperative recovery allow for the optimal return to your full normal life style.

After the initial burst of high energy healing and the "bulking up" of scar tissue, the wound enters a maturation phase, and the scar tissue becomes thinner, less red, and stronger. The maturing and stabilization of scar tissue occurs over a period of 6 to 12 months. Long-term changes tend to be more subtle, slower, and less evident than short-term changes that occur in the first 6 to 8 weeks.

Vigorous exercise activities can gradually be resumed in the postoperative period. One-third intensity is usually acceptable at 2 to 3 weeks, 2/3 intensity at 4 to 6 weeks and full intensity at 6 to 8 weeks. Areas not affected by the surgery can be exercised more strenuously than those near the surgical site.

Please use common sense to dictate the details of your postoperative activities. I expect you to be sore and this is OK. If you have any deep, sharp, burning pains with activity, then you must back off. Rest, ice, and resume activities more gradually with less intensity after 2 to 3 days. There are no absolute parameters regarding return to postoperative activities and one must adjust for variation in pain tolerance, invasiveness of surgery and healing variations.

In general, you cannot speed up the healing process, only slow it down by too much activity too soon. Over exertion can lengthen the period of time for pain to decrease, swelling and bruising to resolve, and the final surgical results to be evident. For facial surgical procedure, I expect you to feel OK at 10 days, look OK with make-up and camouflage at 2 weeks, and look better than you did preoperatively by 4 weeks. Healing occurs for up to one (1) year, sometimes longer. The latter changes tend to be subtle and gradual, and therefore not nearly as dramatic as in the initial 6 to 8 weeks.

Please be patient with your own healing. Any change in your appearance affects your perception of self-image and requires an adjustment period of days to weeks. It is normal to have mild feelings of doubt or a low mood during this period in the first 1 to 3 weeks following surgery. These feelings are then rapidly replaced by positive feelings as healing progresses and you adjust to your improved appearance.