

Press release

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6 million living with life-changing scars, new research reveals

- An estimated 6 million UK adults are living with scars that affect their physical or emotional wellbeing, new research reveals.*
- A major new report reveals that the scale and severity of scarring is being overlooked.
- The Scar Free Foundation calls for joined-up patient pathways to end fragmented care.
- More funding is needed in scarring research to tackle this overlooked but preventable health issue.

An estimated 6 million UK adults are living with scars that affect their physical or emotional wellbeing, new research reveals.

The findings have been released in a major new report – *The Impact of Scarring* – warning that the scale and long-term consequences of scarring are being overlooked.

The new data reveals a significant gap between perceptions of scars and the reality of living with significant scarring. Almost a third of people (31%¹) see scarring predominantly as a cosmetic issue. Meanwhile, nearly half (48%²) of people are not aware of the potential impacts beyond the initial injury or surgery that can result from scarring, such as the financial costs associated with repeated or ongoing treatment or work-related impacts including time away from work or reduced productivity.

Scarring can also develop internally, in conditions affecting the lungs, heart, liver and kidneys – something under half (43%) know to be true. This damage can prevent vital organs from working properly and ultimately prove fatal, with nearly half of all deaths in high-income countries attributable to diseases involving internal scarring.

There are also significant gaps in understanding around how some groups are affected by scarring. A third of UK adults (33%) are unaware that armed forces veterans who sustain serious injuries during military service can require treatment for scars for years after their original injury has healed, and nearly half (48%³) are unaware that people from some ethnic minority backgrounds can experience differences in the care or treatment they receive.

The public also underestimates the complexity of treatment for people living with significant scars. Nearly a quarter (24%) wrongly believe that someone left with significant scarring following an injury, burn or surgery will usually have one specialist or team coordinating their scar treatment and ongoing care, when this isn't the case. Care can often fall between many services. Someone treated in a specialist burns service may have access to established scar care, while someone scarred after other surgery, or with keloids, may not. Access can

¹ “Strongly agree” and “Somewhat agree” options combined

² Combining those who have selected “Not very aware” or “Not at all aware” options for either “Financial costs associated with repeated or ongoing treatment” or “Time away from work or reduced productivity”

³ “Not at all aware” and “Not very aware” responses combined.

depend on where someone lives, how the scar began and whether clinicians know where to refer them.

The findings come as more than half of UK adults (54%) say significant scarring should be treated by the NHS as a long-term condition – in the same way as diabetes and asthma.

Lieutenant General (Retired) Richard Nugee CB, CVO, CBE, Chief Executive of The Scar Free Foundation, said:

“Scars are too often dismissed as something cosmetic – a mark left behind once an injury or operation has healed. But for millions of people, the reality is very different.

“Significant scarring can cause lifelong pain, restrict movement, affect mental health and require years of treatment. Yet our research shows that the true scale and consequences of scarring remain widely misunderstood.

“We cannot afford to keep overlooking scarring as a serious, long-term health issue. Acting late costs more, and money is being wasted as too many people face a fragmented system of care, with missed opportunities for early intervention that could improve lives and reduce the need for more costly treatment further down the line.

“By investing in research, intervening earlier and delivering better coordinated care, there is an opportunity not only to make substantial savings for the NHS, but to transform the lives of millions. The human and financial costs of failing to act are enormous. We need to stop treating scarring as an afterthought and start recognising it as the major health issue it is.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

About the report

The Impact of Scarring unearths the hidden personal, health and economic burden of scarring and includes a Research Roadmap with the potential to transform treatment, care and quality of life for people living with scarring.

The Scar Free Foundation is calling for:

- **Consistent criteria for deciding when to treat a scar**, based on pain and itching, movement, severity, psychological impact, quality of life and the likely benefit of treatment. This would not mean funding every aesthetic procedure. It would give a clear and fair basis for deciding when to act.
- **Joined-up patient pathways** covering burns, surgery and trauma, with early risk checks, psychological support alongside physical care, support that meets the specific needs of veterans with conflict injuries, care that works for every skin tone and clear routes to specialist services.
- **A coordinated national research programme** spanning scar biology, new and existing treatments, psychological support and health economics, with people with scars involved at every stage.

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*Research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 2,001 UK nationally representative respondents. The data was collected between 02.10.2026 - 05.10.2026. Censuswide is a member of the Market Research Society (MRS) and the British Polling Council (BPC), and a signatory of the Global Data Quality Pledge. Censuswide adheres to the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles

About The Scar Free Foundation

The [Scar Free Foundation](#). The Scar Free Foundation is the only medical research charity dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by scarring today, while working towards a future free from scars.