

Effectiveness of W-plasty for revision of self-harm scars on the arms

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Purposes: The wrist scars that arise after self-harming cutting are distinctive and can be of concern to the patient. However, standard treatments for these cases have not yet been established. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of revising cutting-induced scars by using W-plasty.

Methods: Consecutive patients with wrist scars from self-cutting were recruited prospectively and treated with W-plasty surgery. W-plasty involves cutting the scar margins into small triangular components that are then advanced and interdigitated without any rotation or transposition. The design of the W-plasty should be guided by the relaxed skin tension line that is defined for each individual patient.

Results: Five Japanese patients (80% female; age range, 26–50 years) underwent W-plasties on five scars on the wrist. The follow up period was 8 months to 7 years. The treatment resulted in significantly less noticeable and more socially acceptable scars and all patients were satisfied. The scars initially evinced some redness that disappeared over time. Scar contractures were never observed.

Conclusion: W-plasty is a very commonly used excisional revision technique that increases the area of excision. It is thus useful for revising the multiple wide linear scars that arise after wrist cutting. We believe that this method is useful for camouflaging deliberate self-harm scars on the arm.