

Radial Forearm Free Flap (RFFF) Exercise and Advice Leaflet

What is a radial forearm free flap?

- An area of skin and tissue taken from your forearm and used to reconstruct part of your mouth following head and neck surgery.
- It is a living graft so the blood vessels in the graft are connected to the blood vessels in the mouth

What are the risks of a radial forearm free flap?

Like any surgery using a living graft there is a risk that the blood supply to the graft could fail.

To monitor this medical staff will closely and regularly check the flap to ensure a good blood supply.

Why should I exercise?

- Following your radial forearm free flap it is important that you start to exercise your elbow, fingers and wrist to regain full movement.
- You may find that some of your movements are restricted following your operation due to the bandage. This bandage is usually removed and changed 10 days after your operation.
- Gentle exercise will also reduce any swelling in the hand and help prevent stiffness in your elbow and wrist joints.

When can I start my exercises?

It is recommended to start your exercises 2-3 days following your operation. Your physiotherapist will advise you when to start these exercises after your operation.

What exercises should I be doing?

Most patients benefit from simple exercises. Following a radial forearm free flap it important to keep your elbow, wrist and fingers moving. As Physiotherapists, we encourage you to start with four simple exercises

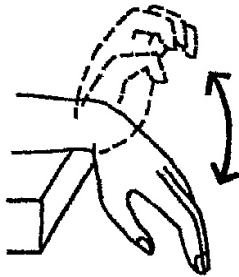


- Supporting your operated arm at your elbow straighten the elbow until you feel a stretch in your forearm. Hold for approx 30 seconds then relax.

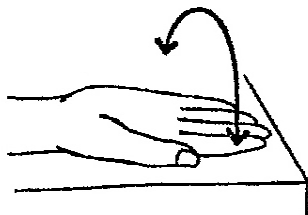


- Supporting your elbow on a table keep your wrist straight and fingers

pointing towards the ceiling, make a fist (thumb over fingers). Then straighten your fingers and repeat.



- Support your forearm on a table with your hand relaxed over the edge. Extend the wrist and clench your fist. Then relax letting your hand drop.



- Start with your forearm supported on the arm of a chair with your palm down. Turn your palm over keeping your elbow still, then repeat.

How often should I do these exercises?

It is recommended to exercises 3 times a day for approx 5 – 10 minutes. It is also best to do 'little and often'.

Your Physiotherapist will advise you following your operation on exactly what's best for you to be doing.

How will I know if I've done too much?

Over exercising may lead to soreness and stiffness the next day. To avoid this complete all exercises **gently** and **slowly**.

What can I not do?

Following a radial forearm free flap we ask you not to do any heavy lifting for a few weeks after your operation. This includes

things like lifting your children, carrying heavy shopping bags or hoovering. This is to prevent any pulling on the graft site.

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www.headandneckcancer.org.uk

Merseyside Regional Head and Neck Centre

www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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