

What is a fibula free flap?

- A fibula free flap is when an area of tissue and bone is taken from one of your bones in the lower leg (fibula).
- This flap is often used to reconstruct areas in your mouth that require replacement bone following surgery for head and neck cancer.
- The flap is a living graft which means that the blood vessels in the flap are then connected to the blood vessels in the mouth.

What are the risks of a fibula free flap?

Like with any surgical procedure involving a living graft there is a risk that the blood supply through the graft can fail.

In order to monitor this, nursing staff will regularly check that the blood supply is good.

When can I walk after surgery?

- After your surgery you may find it sore to put weight onto your affected leg but this will ease over several days.
- In order to help with reducing pain and improving the movement of your leg, gentle exercises can be performed whilst you are in a chair or on bed.

- We will try to get you out of bed and sitting in a chair on the second day after your operation and on the third day we will try and get you up and walking again.
- Depending on the area of bone taken, your lower leg may be bandaged or placed in a plaster cast.
- Initially you may find that you require a walking frame, elbow crutches or walking sticks to help you with your walking, as this allows you to take some of the weight off your affected leg.
- Your Physiotherapist will help progress your walking on the ward, indicating to you how much weight you are allowed to put through your leg, and they will also monitor you regularly.

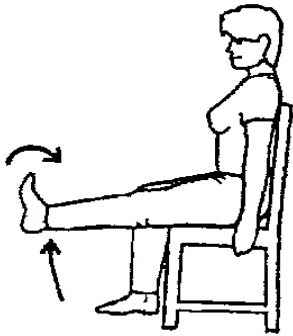
Why should I exercise?

- Following your fibula free flap it is important that you start to exercise your hip, knee and ankle joints in order for you to regain full movement.
- You may find that your knee and ankle movements are restricted after surgery but this is often due to bandaging, swelling, the position of any drains and clips in your skin.
- Gentle exercise will also help to reduce any swelling in the area.

When can I start my exercises?

Most patients following a fibula free flap will have a drain in place for 2-3 days to help drain off any excess fluid following surgery.

It is best to start your exercises when this drain has been removed. As Physiotherapists, we encourage you to start with the following exercises;



1. While sitting in a chair, pull your toes towards you so you feel a stretch at the back of your calf, and then straighten your knee.

Hold this position for several seconds then relax. Repeat with both legs, one at a time.



2. ^A second exercise you can do while lying on your back in bed. Bend and straighten your leg.

Repeat with both legs, one at a time.



3. Again while lying on your back or while sitting in a chair, bend and straighten your ankles as far as you can.

If you keep your knees straight during this exercise you will stretch your calf muscles.



4. When sitting with your foot on the floor. Alternately raise the inner border of your foot (big toe) and then the outer border (little toe).

Repeat with the other foot.

How often should I do these exercises?

It is always best to do 'little and often' rather than lots of exercises at one time.

Exercising twice a day for between five and ten minutes is recommended.

Your Physiotherapist will be able to advise you on exactly what you should be doing.

How will I know if I have done too much?

If you over exercise you may well feel sore and stiff the following day.

The best policy is to avoid this if possible making sure you exercise **gently** and **slowly**.

Further information.

For any further information feel free to contact your Physiotherapist,

Ruth Price/Barry Scott
Specialist Head and Neck Physiotherapist

Telephone Number: 0151 525 5980
and ask for Bleep 3335

Or;

0151 529 5195 (Ward 29)
0151 529 5239 (Ward 28)

www.headandneckcancer.co.uk

Merseyside Regional Head and Neck
Cancer Centre

www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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