

What is a fibula free flap?

A fibula free flap is when an area of tissue and bone (fibula) is taken from the lower leg.

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 connected to the blood vessels in the neck. 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 on to 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 a 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 or whether you have a skin graft, your lower leg may be bandaged.

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 monitor you regularly and help progress your walking on the ward, indicating how much weight you are allowed to put through your leg.

You are advised not to drive for between 6 and 8 weeks following your surgery. Please discuss when to return to driving with your doctor, the DVLA and your insurance provider.

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. This is often due to bandaging, swelling and the position of any drains and clips in your skin.

Gentle exercise will help to reduce any swelling in the area

Scar management

We encourage you to begin scar massage as soon as your clips/stitches are out and your scar line is healed.

You will be shown how to do this by your physiotherapist

Massage should be carried out with a non-perfumed cream or oil at least three times a day.

The most effective massage involves small circular motions with your thumbs over your scar.

Please continue with massage, 2-3 times a day, for at least six months following your surgery.

Further information

For any further information or advice feel free to contact your physiotherapist:

Physiotherapy Department

Tel: 01342 414255

Fibula Free Flap

Exercise and advice leaflet

Please ask if you
would like this leaflet
in larger print or a
different format.

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