

Recovering after flap surgery

This factsheet explains what you should be aware of following your reconstructive surgery with a flap and advises who to contact if you have any concerns.

Flap surgery involves transferring a piece (flap) of skin and fat, and sometimes muscle, from one part of your body (the donor site) to reconstruct another area where tissue has been removed due to your cancer surgery (the recipient site). Your wounds will usually be closed with stitches or staples and covered with a dressing.

Looking after your wounds

- It is normal to have some swelling, bruising or tenderness around the flap reconstruction. If you notice any severe colour changes, contact The Royal Marsden immediately (contact details on page 2).
- You may shower briefly and pat the dressings dry. The dressings may then be fully dried with a hair dryer on a cool setting.
- It is important to keep the reconstructed area warm and not to restrict it with any tight clothing, footwear or headwear.
- The new flap will lack feeling. **You should completely avoid using hot water bottles or heat pads on any area that you have had surgery. The skin may look normal, however there may be altered sensation in the area which can result in significant burns.**
- At first it is important to avoid exercise, driving and heavy lifting. Please discuss this further with your specialist nurse or surgeon.
- When you go home, it is important to reduce the swelling in the area. This is achieved by elevation. If the flap is on your face then sleep with extra pillows. If the flap is on your arm or hand then rest it on some pillows to raise the area. You may be given a sling to use during the day. If the flap is on your leg, you can elevate your leg on a foot stool or a pillow if you are in bed.
- You should not smoke before or after your operation as it will increase the risk of complications occurring.
- If you are wearing a splint, your nurse or physiotherapist will advise how to use this and when to wear it.



Possible complications

If you experience any of the following, please contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:

- Increasing levels of pain at your wound or donor site
- Fever
- Redness, increased heat or swelling around your wound
- Increased loss of sensation, numbness or tingling
- Leakage from your wounds which may be malodorous (an unpleasant smell)
- Yellow fluid (pus) from your wounds.

Contact details

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, seven days a week)

Please contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist (Plastic Surgery) if you would like further advice.

Chelsea: 020 7811 8318 (NHS)
020 352 8171 Ex. 1573 (Private)

Sutton: 020 352 8171 Ex. 4345
(NHS & Private)

