

Patient Education

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center



A latissimus dorsi free flap is one way to fill a hole in either the upper or lower jaw. It is often used to replace bone that has been removed for cancer treatment.

This handout gives self-care instructions to follow at home after your surgery.

After Your Latissimus Dorsi Free Flap

Self-care at home

Diet

Before you leave the hospital, your health care provider will tell you what foods you can and cannot eat when you get home.

Wound Care

Scalp and Neck Incisions

- Use a solution of half hydrogen peroxide and half saline to clean your neck incision 2 times a day.
- Use **only** saline to clean your scalp incision 2 times a day.
- After you clean your incisions, apply a light layer of Aquaphor ointment. Do not cover them. Keeping them open to the air will help them heal.

Back Incision

- Wash your back incision with soap and water every day. Before you leave the hospital, you will learn more about how to care for your back incision at home.

Skin Graft at Scalp

- You will have a 5-inch by 9-inch Xeroform gauze over your scalp graft. Change this gauze every day. You may wear a “crani-cap” (like a skull cap) over the Xeroform to hold the dressing in place.

Skin Graft Donor Site

- Trim the loose edges of the Acticoat dressing at your thigh every day.
- For the first week, cover the dressing with plastic wrap and tape the edges to keep the area dry when you shower. You may get the dressing wet in the shower 1 week after you leave the hospital.
- When the dressing comes off all the way, your skin will be moist for 24 to 36 hours. Put a nonstick dressing over the area to protect it. After 36 hours, you may put lotion on the new skin. **If you do use lotion, be sure to use one like Aquaphor that does not contain additives.**

Physical Therapy

- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 10 to 15 pounds for 2 weeks after you leave the hospital.

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Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center: 206-598-4022

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Nurse Voice Mail Line at 206-598-7535. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.

After hours and on holidays and weekends, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Otolaryngologist on call to be paged.

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Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center

Box 356161

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195
206-598-4022

- Keep doing the physical activity that your physical therapist prescribed during your hospital stay.

Follow-up Visit

You will have a follow-up visit 1 week after you leave the hospital. This appointment will be in the Otolaryngology Clinic with a nurse practitioner. Your appointment will be set before you leave the hospital.

When to Call the Clinic

Call the Otolaryngology Clinic if you have:

- Fever higher than 100°F (37.8°C) or chills
- Any change in the area of your surgery:
 - Increased pain
 - Swelling
 - Bad smell
 - Draining fluid
- Any change in your neck or back incisions:
 - Increased pain
 - Swelling or redness
 - Draining fluid
 - Incision opens up

Medicine

When you leave the hospital, you may receive these prescriptions:

- **Pain medicine:** Take this medicine with food, as prescribed, to prevent nausea. Please see the handout you were given on pain medicines.
- **Low-dose aspirin (81 mg):** You will take 1 low-dose aspirin every day for 1 month. You can buy this medicine without a prescription at any drugstore. It will help keep a good blood supply flowing to your surgery site, and this will help with healing.
- **Antibiotics:** You may be advised to take antibiotics to prevent infection. Take them as prescribed.

Call the clinic if you have any problems with pain or with your medicines. Your nurse practitioner will talk with you about your medicines at your 1-week clinic visit.

To Prevent Constipation

- Take stool softeners. You can buy these without a prescription at any drugstore.
- Drink plenty of fluids.