

# Regional Flap Reconstruction

## *What to expect and how to prepare*

*This handout explains the most common flap donor sites that are used at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) to reconstruct after surgical removal of skin, fat, muscle, or skeletal support.*

*At the Center for Reconstructive Surgery, our goal is to help your body maintain as much form and function as possible.*



*Scan this QR code with your phone camera for a digital copy of this handout.*

### **What is regional flap reconstruction?**

A regional flap reconstruction is a procedure that involves moving healthy tissue from one part of your body (donor site) to repair a defect (recipient site). A regional flap moves tissue while maintaining the blood flow from the donor site.

At the Center for Reconstructive Surgery, our goal is to help your body maintain as much form and function as possible.

### **Activity restrictions for ALL flap surgeries**

- For 6 weeks, avoid aerobic exercise (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Do not lift anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.

### **Recipient flap site \_\_\_\_\_**

Restrictions:

- For 6 weeks, avoid compression to the site that received the flap (ie. repaired defect or recipient site). Avoid sleeping on surgical site.
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## Donor Sites

### Drains

You will likely have drain(s) placed at your donor site at the time of surgery. We will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout “Closed Bulb Drain Care: For a Jackson-Pratt (JP) or Blake Drain” to learn more.

### Back

**Latissimus Flap (Lat Flap):** The latissimus muscle is on your upper back. Surgeons keep the blood supply attached and move muscle, fat and sometimes skin to cover the upper chest or back.

Restrictions:

- Do not push, pull or lift anything heavier than 8lbs (a gallon of water) for 4 weeks after your surgery.
- Do not raise your arm above shoulder height on your surgical site for 4 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid raising your arm past 45 degrees to your side. Avoid closing your arm less than 30 degrees toward your body. We recommend keeping a pillow under your armpit to avoid pressure on the blood flow.

### Abdominal

**Rectus Flap (TRAM or ORAM Flap):** The rectus abdominis muscle is in your abdomen next to your belly button. This can include transverse rectus abdominis muscle or oblique rectus abdominis muscle. Surgeons keep the blood supply attached and move muscle, fat and sometimes skin to cover the groin or other local abdominal defect.

Restrictions:

- Do not push, pull or lift anything heavier than 8lbs (a gallon of water) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid any abdominal straining or abdominal exercises for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- We recommend compression to your abdomen. This includes wearing snug clothes around your abdomen, such as bicycle shorts, yoga pants, or Spanx shapewear. If you are placed in an abdominal binder, please wear 24/7 for the first 6 weeks after your surgery. You may remove it for showering and laundering. Compression will help lower the amount of fluid your body retains.

**Omentum Flap:** The omentum is made up of fat, connective tissue and lymphatics that connects the stomach to other abdominal organs. Surgeons remove part of this apron-like fold to cover bony prominences, medical devices/hardware, or when operating in the lymphatic system.

Restrictions:

- Do not push, pull or lift anything heavier than 8lbs (a gallon of water) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid any abdominal straining or abdominal exercises for 6 weeks after your surgery.

We recommend compression to your abdomen this includes wearing snug clothes around your abdomen, such as bicycle shorts, yoga pants, or Spanx shapewear. If you are placed in an abdominal binder please wear 24/7 for the first 6 weeks after your surgery. This will help lower the amount of fluid your body retains.

## Lower Extremity

**Anterolateral Thigh Flap (ALT Flap):** The anterolateral thigh flap uses skin, fat and blood supply from your outer thigh and can be used to cover large defects (often on the arm). The area is closed primarily with a vertical incision along the outside of the upper leg.

Restrictions:

- Do not move your leg more than 45 degrees away from your body (for example, wider than shoulder width) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid bending at your hip (sit, step, squat) more than 90 degrees for 6 weeks after your surgery.

## Gracilis Flap

- The gracilis muscle is in your inner thigh and can be used along with skin and fat to cover upper or lower extremity areas. The area is closed primarily with an incision along the groin line and/or vertically along the inner upper leg.

Restrictions:

- Do not move your leg more than 45 degrees away from your body (for example, wider than shoulder width) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid bending at your hip (sit, step, squat) more than 90 degrees for 6 weeks after your surgery.

## Other

### Singapore Flap

- This procedure uses the blood supply and fat from the inner thigh and groin for vaginal reconstruction, perineal wound closure, or rectovaginal fistula repair.

Restrictions:

- Do not move your leg more than 45 degrees away from your body (for example, wider than shoulder width) for 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid bending at your hip (sit, step, squat) 90 degrees for 6 weeks after your surgery.
  - Sit in a beach recliner position.
  - Side-sit to avoid direct pressure to your perineum

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

#### **During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8am to 5pm):**

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if applicable.

Alternatively, you may call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206-598-1217, option 2.

#### **Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours**

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206-598-6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.

### Pain Control

- Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.”
- Please do not use ice or heat directly on your surgical sites.

### When to Contact the Care Team:

#### **Call the clinic nurse if you have:**

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site
  - Redness
  - Increased swelling
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Pus or cloudy colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer eased by your pain medicine

**If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911.**

**If you are experiencing redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb, this may be signs of a blood clot, please go to your local ER.**