

Anterolateral Thigh Free Flap

Head and Neck Cancer Services

Aintree University Hospital 
NHS Foundation Trust

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What is an anterolateral thigh free flap?

- An anterolateral thigh (ALT) free flap is an area of tissue and muscle that is taken from the outer border of your thigh.
- This is often used to reconstruct areas in your mouth that require replacement tissue 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 an anterolateral thigh 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.

Why should I exercise?

- Following your ALT free flap it is important that you start to exercise your hip and knee in order for you to regain full movement.
- General exercises for your ankle are also encouraged.
- You may find that your hip and knee movements are restricted after surgery but this is often due to the bandaging, swelling and the position of any drains in your leg.

- Gentle exercise will also help to reduce any swelling in the area and help prevent hip and knee joint stiffness.

When can I start to walk?

- We will try to get you out of bed and sitting in a chair on the second day after your operation and up walking on your third day.
- Initially you may find that you require a walking frame, elbow crutches or walking sticks to help you with your walking, which will allow you to take some of the weight off your affected leg.

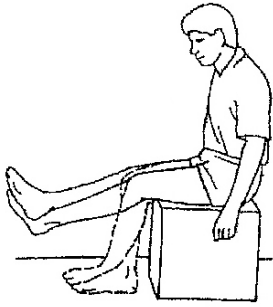
Your physiotherapist will progress your walking on the ward and monitor you regularly.

When can I start my exercises?

Most patients following an ALT 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 neck drain has been removed.

What exercises should I be doing?

Following an ALT free flap, most patients benefit from simple exercises to keep your hip, knee and ankle joints moving. As Physiotherapists we encourage you to start with four simple exercises;



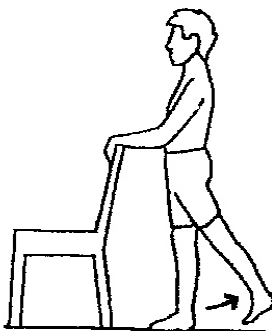
1. While sitting, pull your toes towards you so you feel a stretch at the back of your calf and then straighten your knee. Hold this for several seconds then relax. Repeat with each leg.



2. While lying on your back in bed, bend and straighten your leg. Repeat with each leg.



3. While lying on your back or sitting, 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. Stand straight holding on to a chair. Bring your leg backwards keeping your knee straight. Do not lean forwards.

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
Tel: 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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0151 529 4969

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