

## Patient information

### **Deep Circumflex Iliac Artery Free Flap (DCIA) Exercise and Advice Leaflet**

Head and Neck Cancer Centre - Physiotherapy Department Aintree

#### **What is a deep circumflex iliac artery free flap?**

- A deep circumflex iliac artery free flap (**DCIA**) is an area of tissue and bone taken from the rim of your pelvis.
- It 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. This means blood vessels in the flap are connected to blood vessels in the mouth.

#### **What are the risks of a DCIA 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 is blood supply is good.

#### **Why should I exercise?**

- Following your DCIA flap it is very important that you start to exercise your hip to regain full range of movement.
- Gentle exercises of your knee and ankle are also encouraged.
- Your hip movements will likely be restricted after surgery but this is often due to bandaging, swelling and drain position.
- Gentle exercise will help to reduce that swelling and prevent joint stiffness.

#### **When can I start to walk?**

- We will aim to get you out of bed and sitting in a chair the day after your operation and hopefully walking the day after that.
- You may find it sore to put weight onto your affected leg but this will ease over a few days.
- In order to help with reducing pain and improving movement of your leg, gentle exercises can be performed whilst you are in the chair or bed.

- Initially you may 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 closely.

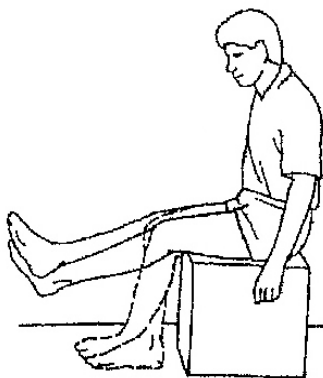
### **When can I start my exercises?**

Most patients following an DCIA flap will have a drain in situ for two-three days to help drain off any excess fluid.

It is best to start your exercises once this drain has been removed so you can move freely.

### **What exercises should I be doing?**

Most patients benefit from simple exercises to keep their hip, knee and ankle joints moving. As physiotherapists we encourage you to start with these 4 simple exercises:



1. While sitting pull your toes back until you can feel a stretch at the back of your calf, and then straighten your knee.

Hold this for several seconds then relax. Repeat this with each leg.

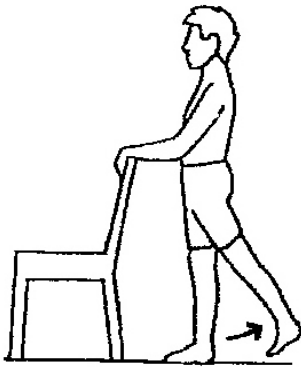


2. While lying on your back bend and straighten your leg. Repeat with each leg.



3. In lying or sitting, bend and straighten your ankles as far as you can.

With your knees straight during this you are stretching your calf muscles.



4. Stand straight holding onto a chair. Bring your leg backwards keeping your knee straight. Repeat with the other leg.

### **How often should I do these exercises?**

It is recommended to exercise three times a day for approx five-ten minutes. It is also best to do 'little and often'.

Your physiotherapist will advise you following your operation on exactly what's best for you.

### **How will I know if I've done too much?**

Over exercising may lead to soreness and stiffness the next day. To avoid this complete all exercises **gently** and **slowly**.

### **Feedback**

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## Further information

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**[www.headandneckcancer.org.uk](http://www.headandneckcancer.org.uk)**  
**Merseyside Regional Head and Neck Cancer Centre**

**[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)**  
**The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy**

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