



FLAP AND GRAFT REPAIR

Why perform flap or graft repair?

Where a cancer is too large to be removed and the skin re-joined, a flap or graft repair may be required. This has the ability to give a good cosmetic result where a large amount of tissue has been removed.

How is a flap performed?

A flap takes skin from an area where there is some spare to move it into a place where there is not enough skin to close the wound. The flap is cut at the same time as the cancer is removed. It stays connected to the skin on at least one side. It is stitched into its new position. A flap usually heals very well as it is still connected to its blood supply on at least one side. Flaps are common on the nose, other parts of the face and lower legs.

How is a graft performed?

A graft is where a piece of skin is removed from one part of the body where there is spare tissue to be placed in another part of the body where there is not enough skin to close the wound. It is stitched into its new position. The most common places to take a graft from are the armpit, behind the ear or the forehead. They are usually used to fill parts of the nose, lower legs or ears, where a cancer has been removed. Grafts need special care to heal, as the piece of skin has been completely removed from its blood supply and needs to receive a new blood supply in its new position. Grafts need pressure on them to make sure there is no bleeding underneath. This is applied by tight bandage or by dressings being tied over the graft by the stitches.

When grafts are performed in hospitals, they are usually split skin grafts, which involve scratching the top layers off the skin. These are usually very painful at the site of skin removal. Here, only full thickness grafts are performed, which are much less painful while healing.

What are the risks?

The usual risks of bleeding and infection are more frequent, due to the more serious interruption to the blood supply. Scarring is usually more apparent, especially in the case of grafts, where the piece filling the gap comes from elsewhere and is therefore a slightly different colour. A graft may grow hair where there has not previously been hair. The most serious complication is necrosis of the flap or graft, where it has failed to grow a new blood supply. The graft may need to be repeated, or a graft used where a flap has failed. If the area of necrosis is small, the area may just need to be dressed frequently until healing occurs from the surrounding skin.

How do I look after the wound?

Leave dressings intact until the next doctor's appointment. Keep the area clean and dry. Dressings may need to be changed every few days for a few weeks. The doctor will advise you when to book appointments, as every flap or graft is different. If you have any concerns please call the clinic for advice.