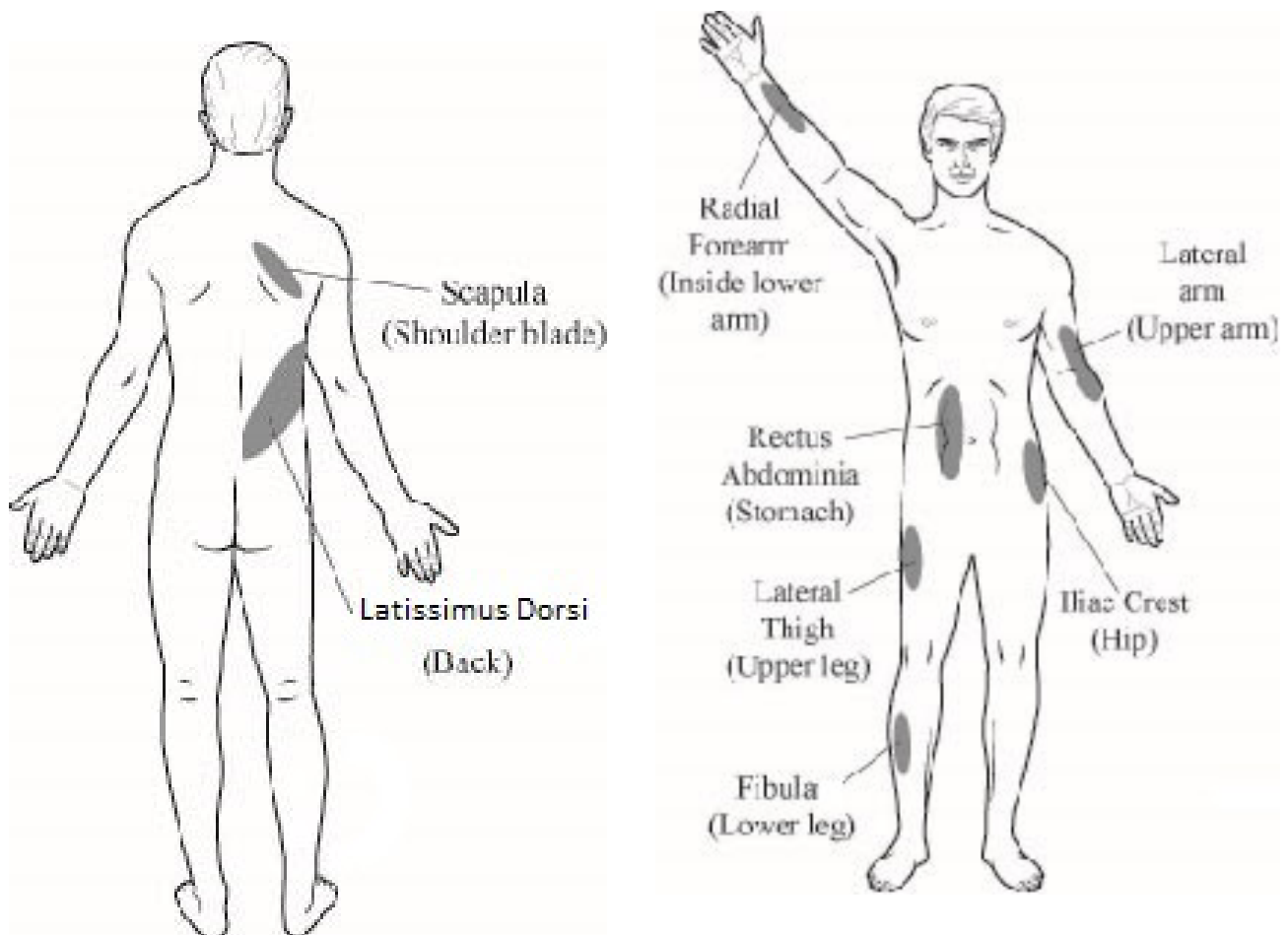


## Free Flap Reconstruction Surgery

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A free flap is a piece of skin, tissue and/or bone that is moved from one area of the body to another. The free flap is used to rebuild the area where your surgery was done.

There are many places on your body where the doctor may take the free flap. Here are the common areas where a flap may be removed.



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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

## Types of Free Flaps

The type of free flap that will be used for your surgery is checked below.

Some types of free flaps need a skin graft. To do a skin graft, the doctor will take skin from another part of your body (usually the upper leg) to cover the area where the free flap was removed. Your doctor will tell you if this needs to be done.

### Radial Forearm Free Flap

Your doctor will take bone, skin and fat layer along with blood vessels from your lower arm. You will also have skin taken from your upper leg to cover the area on your lower arm where the free flap was removed. When you wake up from surgery, you will have a splint on your arm and a dressing on your leg.

### Fibular Free Flap

Your doctor will take tissue and a small piece from your lower leg bone (fibula) for your reconstructive surgery. **Taking out this bone and tissue does not affect your ability to walk or move.**

### Lateral Thigh Free Flap

This type of free flap is used when a large amount of tissue is needed. Your doctor will take tissue and blood vessels from the side of the upper leg (thigh) for your reconstructive surgery.

### Scapular Free Flap

This type of free flap may be done when another area cannot be used. Your doctor will take an area of bone, tissue and blood vessels from your shoulder blade for your reconstructive surgery. You may need physical therapy after this surgery. Your doctor will order this therapy if it is needed.

### **Other possible areas where your doctor may take tissue, bone and blood vessels to make a free flap include:**

- Iliac Crest (hip)
- Rectus Abdominaria (stomach)
- Lateral Arm (upper arm)
- Latissimus Dorsi (back)

## Smoking

- Smoking may cause problems with blood circulation and healing. **It is very important that you do not smoke for 2 weeks before surgery and for 1 week after your surgery.**
- You should **not** use a nicotine patch or nicotine gum because they can cause a decrease in blood flow to the area where you will have your surgery.
- The James has resources available to help you quit smoking.

## What should I expect after free flap surgery?

- You will be in the hospital so your doctor can keep a close watch on the areas where you had surgery.
- A special machine called a Doppler will be used to check and make sure the surgery area(s) have proper blood flow.
- Some free flap sites need a drain (small tube with bulb on the end) to be placed during surgery. This allows drainage from the site to help with healing. Your doctor will decide when the drain can be removed.
- You may need to take pain medicine after surgery. These drugs may slow the movement of your bowels. Your doctor may have you take a stool softener or other medicines to help your bowels move.
- You will have a scar. All cuts made through the skin leave a scar, but most fade with time.

## Before You Leave the Hospital

- You will be given instructions about how to take care of the areas where you had surgery.
- You will have a follow up appointment scheduled with your doctor. Your free flap will be checked at this appointment.

## **When to Call Your Doctor**

Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Chills or fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher
- Bleeding or drainage from your incision that has increased or changed
- Foul smelling drainage
- Pain that is getting worse and not relieved by pain medicine
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation (problems having a bowel movement)
- Trouble swallowing or eating