

# BRACHIAL PLEXIS REPAIR+/- FREE FLAP

## WHAT IS A BRACHIAL PLEXIS REPAIR+/- FREE FLAP?

The brachial plexus is a complex network of nerves that extends from the spinal cord within the neck down to the chest area supplying nerves to the chest, shoulder and arm. Brachial plexus injuries are caused by trauma that affects the region of the neck and shoulder. Partial injuries most commonly occur in the upper part of the brachial plexus and result in paralysis of shoulder and elbow function. The arm is left hanging at the side, but hand function is usually preserved. Free flaps include a number of nerve transfers, in which a less essential nerve or nerve section is transferred to restore function in a more crucial nerve. When the brachial plexus is completely injured, patients have no function at all in the arm. Generally the arm can neither feel nor be moved. With these injuries, it is important to determine which nerves are scarred or torn versus those that are avulsed. Reconstructive surgery for complete brachial plexus injuries generally consists of a combination of nerve grafting and nerve transfer procedures. The treatment for each patient will be determined according to his or her individual condition.

## What sort of anaesthetic will I have?

The anaesthetist will discuss with you the type of anaesthetic, which is best for you. This type of surgery requires a general anaesthetic. Any questions regarding your anaesthetic can be asked prior to your surgery.

## After your surgery

Patients will be reviewed by a physiotherapist, if required. How you recover depends on the procedure that you have had but in general it is good to move around a little to reduce the chances of chest infections and encourage blood circulation.

## What kind of pain relief will I need?

The method of pain relief to be used for you will be decided by your surgeon and anaesthetist on the day of your operation. After your surgery prior to discharge, your pain should be controlled with oral analgesia such as Paracetamol and / or Codeine. Ensure if you are taking NSAIDS such as Ibuprofen, they are taken with food and not on an empty stomach. If you require any other medications after your surgery, your doctor will complete a discharge script which will be given to you prior to your discharge to home. This script can be dispensed at the hospital pharmacy or at your local pharmacy.

## When will I see the doctor?

A follow up appointment will be made for you to return to the hospital 1 week after you're discharged from hospital. The appointment will be on **1 West Hand and Wound clinic**. Information regarding your surgery will be sent to your general practitioner (GP) regarding the date and type of surgery.

## Patients are advised to follow these instructions:

- No driving until review at your outpatients appointment/ and consultant review
- Avoid lifting or straining 3 months post surgery
- A high energy, high protein diet is recommended to assist with wound healing
- It is recommended you avoid caffeine for six weeks following your surgery
- You should see a dietician if you have unintentional weight loss, irregular blood sugar levels (if you have diabetes) and/or your surgical wound is not healing adequately
- Return to work will be patient specific and as per medical advice
- Continue to wear the sling provided at all times including when showering until review by the surgeon or advised otherwise. If you have been provided with a splint, you must wear this at all times including showering and sleeping. This must be kept dry.
- Follow up Physiotherapy and Hand Therapy will be organised by your surgeon

## Contact your local doctor for the following:

- Continual bleeding or wound discharge
- Irregular bowel actions lasting days
- Red, inflamed or discharge from suture line
- Develop a temperature greater than 38 degrees
- Severe pain not controlled by oral analgesia

## Contact

**If you are unwell and unable to attend the hospital for your surgery, please contact Elective Bookings Service:**

**9342 8400**

**If you have any queries about your operation prior to your surgery, please contact the Elective Bookings Service and asked to be put through to the Unit Liaison Nurse.**

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