

# Information for patients

## Infra temporal fossa clearance

### What is an infra temporal fossa clearance?

This is an operation where doctors remove a tumour from deep inside your face/side of your cheek. This may include removing some of the muscles and nerves that move the face and jaw joint and sometimes the ear canal.

Depending on how much tissue the doctors remove, they may need to reconstruct the side of your face. The doctors will do this using tissue from another area of your body. This piece of tissue is called a 'flap'.

### What happens before my surgery?

Before surgery, some patients attend a pre-admission clinic where the doctor will explain the surgery and you will sign a consent form.

At the clinic, the health care team will ask you about your health, medication and lifestyle. They may test your blood, take x-rays and an electrocardiogram (ECG).

Your doctor will talk to you about what medications to take before you come to hospital.

It is important to tell your doctor if you are taking any blood thinning medications, such as aspirin, warfarin or clopidogrel (Plavix).

Please bring your medications into hospital with you.

If you use a dosette box or pill organiser to take your tablets, please ask your pharmacist to print out a list of your current medications so you can bring this to hospital.

If you do not need to attend the pre-admission clinic, we will telephone you to tell you when your surgery is scheduled and what to bring to hospital. You may also receive a letter informing you of your time and date of surgery. Please make sure you confirm your date for surgery.

The day before your surgery, the hospital will call you between 2.30pm and 7pm to inform you of the time you need to stop eating and drinking and what time to come to hospital.

### What will happen on the day of my surgery?

We ask that you shower before you come to hospital and remove jewellery, make up, nail polish and fake nails. It is advised that you leave valuables such as jewellery and large sums of money at home to decrease the possibility of items being misplaced or stolen.

On the day of your surgery, please make your way to the St Vincent's Day of Surgery Admission (DOSA) area, which is located on the first floor of the In-patient Services Building, Princes Street, Fitzroy.

When you arrive the nursing staff will check your pulse and blood pressure.

You will need an anaesthetic for your surgery. The anaesthetist (the doctor who will give you the anaesthetic) will meet with you before your surgery to talk to you about your health and the best anaesthetic for you.

A general anaesthetic (anaesthetic that puts you to sleep) is normally used for this surgery.

St Vincent's is a busy hospital so please be aware that you may need to wait up to three hours for your operation.

### What happens after the surgery?

You will wake up from the anaesthetic in the recovery room and be transferred to your ward shortly after. A nurse will monitor your blood pressure, pulse and temperature. They will also check the sensation and blood circulation in your leg if you have had a flap taken from your leg.

Your flap will be checked every half hour for the first day after surgery, then every hour for the second day after surgery, every two hours on the third day after surgery and then every four hours until you go home. This checking of the flap is a very important part of your recovery.

You may also have drain tubes in your neck on the side of the operation to drain fluid away and reduce swelling. The nurses will monitor your neck and drain tubes regularly. The drains will be emptied twice a day and will be removed when fluid has stopped draining.

Most operations to the face make eating and drinking difficult or uncomfortable for a time.

You may feel pain after your surgery. The nursing staff will ask regularly about your pain level and will give injections or tablets to help control your pain. Please tell the nurses if you feel nauseous or need to vomit. They can give you something to help you feel better.

You will remain resting in bed for the first 24 hours after your operation, and then the nurses and physiotherapist will assist you to sit out of bed for short periods.

Whilst you are in bed, it is important to avoid crossing your legs and to move them regularly. The physiotherapist will also give you deep breathing exercises to do every hour. The amount of activity you do will be increased slowly until you are able to walk around the ward without assistance.

### **When can I go home?**

Most people stay in hospital for seven to ten days for this type of surgery. Patients are usually discharged at 10am so the room can be prepared for another patient.

Before you leave the ward someone will:

- make a follow-up appointment at St Vincent's Specialist Clinics for you
- send a letter from the hospital to your local doctor (GP)
- give you medication, if the doctor prescribes it
- provide any dressing products you will need for your wound once you go home
- arrange for home nursing visits to assist with wound care if required
- give you a medical certificate if needed (you will need to ask).

Please remember to take all your belongings including x-rays home with you.

### **What should I do once I get home?**

Your doctor may recommend time off work to give your body the best chance of recovery.

You can expect to feel tired after your hospital stay and may need to rest during the day.

You will be able to get dressed independently and should increase your activity levels each day.

If you experience any increased pain, swelling, redness or any changes in the colour or look of your flap, go to your nearest emergency department or GP as soon as possible.

### **Contacts**

#### **Coordinator, Head and Neck Cancer Multidisciplinary Clinic and Liaison Nurse**

Tel: 9288 2755

#### **Waiting List Officer**

Tel: 9288 2271