



Los Angeles County

University of Southern California

Division of Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery

Lower Extremity Reconstruction

What to expect in the Hospital

During Your Hospital Stay

Every patient is different and no two hospital stays are the same. The following is an outline of what you might expect during your stay.

Day of surgery

Before the surgery your doctor will come to speak with you again and answer your questions. After the surgery, you will return to either a ward room or the ICU, where specialized nurses will care for you.

The nurses will:

- Check your flap frequently with a Doppler
- Administer pain medication
- Help you keep your leg elevated
- Monitor drains at the surgical sites
- Place heating blankets on you to keep you and your flap warm

Days 1-3

You will be asked to do deep breathing exercises. Your leg will be in a splint and wrapped with bandages. There may be drains coming from the donor site or from the area of the flaps.

Approximately on Day 3

You will be transferred to a ward bed for the remainder of your stay. You will slowly begin to take food and fluids by mouth at the rate which you tolerate. You will continue to receive pain medications.

You will remain in bed with your leg elevated for the next 5-10 days. This is to reduce excess swelling at the surgical site and to promote healing.

The doctors will be in to see you every day.

Days 4-8

You will continue to remain in bed with your leg elevated. Drains will be removed and the dressing will be changed as needed.

Days 8-10

Your surgeon will instruct you on beginning to dangle your leg over the side of the bed. This will take place a little at a time, starting with 1 – 5 minutes every four hours while you are awake. You will gradually increase the time you do this, usually about five minutes for every day. The goal is to achieve 30 minutes of dangling each time prior to being discharged.

Day 10

A physical therapist will assist you in progression of activity. Your level of activity will depend on the type of flap and/or bone injury that you had and the rate at which heal from your surgery.

After Discharge

You will be scheduled to return for follow-up appointments in the Outpatient Department.

Outpatient Visits

- Plastic surgery A5B
- Orthopedics OPD3P61
- Physical Therapy OPD2P1

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Lower Extremity Reconstruction?

The surgeon takes skin, tissue or muscle locally or from another area of the body and moves it to an area where this tissue is missing or injured. (This is called a “flap”)

2. Why is the surgery necessary?

To reduce missing skin, tissue or muscle that your body cannot replace on its own.

3. Where does the flap come from?

A skin graft is taken from the same leg that is injured. Muscle or tissue flaps can be taken from an area locally or it can be taken from another area of the body. Common areas used to make tissue flaps are areas of the back, abdomen, inner thigh or forearm.

4. Will the tissue that is taken grow back?

Over a period of time, the top layer of skin that is taken gradually heals and grows back, much like burns heal. Other types of tissue such as the bone will not grow back.

5. How long will I be in bed?

Usually you will stay in bed for 5 – 10 days with your leg elevated. Your doctor will decide when you will be able to start gradually dangling your feet off the side of the bed for small periods of time during the day.

6. How long will it take before I can start to walk again?

That will depend on the type of injury that you have. The Orthopedic doctors will continue to care for you and will decide when you will be able to start walking.

7. How long will I stay in the hospital?

Your length of stay at the hospital will depend on the type of injury and the type of surgery that you had. It may also depend on other medical problems that you have.

8. How long before my leg looks “normal”?

Your leg will not look the same as before your injury. After surgery, your leg will be swollen. Over a period of months, the skin color of the flap will change. The space that had the missing skin or muscle will eventually heal to be slightly rounded. Complete recovery and healing are different for each patient and the circumstances.

For further questions call:

Outpatient Department

323-409-5443

Plastic Surgery Office

323-409-7788

Wound Check Clinic

323-409-7828