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Journal
Bulletin of Tokyo Dental College, 43(3): 187-191

URL
http://hdl.handle.net/10130/323
Case Report

ANTEROLATERAL THIGH FLAP

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Received 31 May, 2002/Accepted for Publication 15 July, 2002

Abstract

A 64-year-old Japanese male had a squamous cell carcinoma (T4N1M0) in the left
gingival and buccal mucosa, so a radical wide resection involving left radical neck dissec-
tion was performed. An anterolateral thigh flap measuring 15×8 cm was raised from the
left thigh and transferred to the defect. The postoperative course was eventful. There was
no postoperative flap necrosis, infection, not even a cervical fistula.

Key words: Microsurgery—Oral reconstruction—Anterolateral thigh flap—
Extensive defect—Morbidity

CASE REPORT

The patient was a 64-year-old Japanese male
with a squamous cell carcinoma (T4N1M0)
that originated in the left buccal mucosa and
infiltrated to the mandible and buccal skin of
the left side (Fig. 1). He underwent a wide
excision of the posterior maxilla, the part of
mandible, the buccal mucosa, and the floor
of the mouth, a pharyngectomy and left neck
dissection, including the overlying buccal skin.

A large anterolateral thigh flap, measuring
15×8 cm was obtained simultaneously with
the tumor resection in order to facilitate soft
tissue reconstruction. At first, we reconstructed
the mandible using mandibular reconstruction
plate for internal stabilization of the
remaining mandibular segments. The large
soft tissue defects of the intraoral and facial
regions were reconstructed with the antero-
lateral thigh flap. The buccal defect was
repaired with a folded medial portion of the
skin flap to build the bulkiness of the cheek
prominence.

The first incision was made through the
longitudinal line at the middle of the anterior
aspect of the thigh (Fig. 2). The lateral skin
was elevated through the incision with a pair
of retractors, and the septocutaneous or
muscle perforating artery was visualized. After
confirming the location of the pedicle perfo-
rator, the skin flap was outlined to include the
perforator on the anterolateral thigh region.
After raising the whole skin flap and tran-
secting several muscle branches from the lat-
eral circumflex femoral system, the pedicle
was dissected proximally from the descending branch up to the proximal end of the lateral circumflex femoral vessels. The branch of the femoral nerve running parallel or across this vascular system must be carefully separated from the vascular pedicle.

Vascular anastomoses of the lateral circumflex femoral artery to the facial artery and the venae comitantes of the lateral circumflex femoral artery to the one branch of the facial vein were constructed (Fig. 3).

The postoperative course was uneventful. There was no skin flap necrosis of the facial or intraoral regions, which would have caused intraoral exposure of the plate or an external cervical fistula. Three months after the surgery, his facial appearance had improved, and there was no recurrence of the tumor (Fig. 4). There was complete healing at the donor site with no functional limitation of the donor leg.

Fig. 1 A 64-year-old man with an extensive squamous cell carcinoma of the left buccal mucosa and left skin.

Fig. 2 The design of the anterolateral thigh flap is marked on the right thigh.
A: Thigh flap, B: Rectus femoris muscle,
C: Incision line, D: Deep femoral artery

Fig. 3 Defect after resection of squamous cell carcinoma on the left side of the face.
*: anterolateral thigh flap
ANATOMIC DESCRIPTION

The lateral circumflex femoral system is composed of three main branches: the ascending branch, which passes through the intermuscular space between the sartorius muscle and the vastus lateralis muscle; the transverse branch, which terminates in the tensor fasciae latae muscle; and the descending branch, which runs downward through the intermuscular space between the rectus femoris muscle and the vastus lateralis muscle and finally terminates in the vastus muscle near the knee joint$^{1,4}$ (Fig. 5). The perforator of the lateral thigh flap is usually derived from the transverse branch and the descending branch, and the proximal perforator is situated around the proximal one-third of the thigh through the lateral longitudinal line of the thigh (Fig. 6). This perforator site corresponds to the intermuscular space between the rectus femoris muscle and the vastus lateralis muscle. Usually, a few cutaneous perforators can be seen passing through the intermuscular septum and the vastus lateralis muscle.
DISCUSSION

The numerous advantages of microsurgical tissue transfer for maxillofacial reconstructions are offset by highly complicated techniques that involve taking a lot of operating time and the creation of donor defects\(^ {26,9}\). The choice of the microsurgical transplant has a decisive role in how negative an effect these disadvantages will have. Popular reconstructive methods for defects in head and neck regions are free vascularized intestinal interpositioning, the radial forearm flaps, and the rectus abdominis musculocutaneous flap\(^ {2}\). However, the use of the radial forearm flap is limited in some cases, because complaints of cosmetic problems with the donor scar can arise\(^ {6}\). When a radial forearm flap is used, an extensively wide defect cannot be repaired because the size of the forearm flap is limited. The rectus abdominis musculocutaneous flap may be unsuitable for reconstruction of defects involving relatively small amounts of tissue because the flap is very bulky\(^ {2}\). In cases in which it is difficult to use these popular tissue transfers, the anterolateral thigh flap may be suitable.

The anterolateral thigh is a septocutaneous artery flap based on the septocutaneous or muscle perforators of the lateral circumflex femoral system. This flap is a suitable donor region, but it is still little used in maxillofacial surgery\(^ {17,8}\). Recent studies have demonstrated the advantages of the anterolateral thigh flap to be the following: 1) elevation is easy because there are several perforators deriving from the descending branch of the lateral circumflex femoral system, 2) the diameter of vascular pedicle is approximately 2 mm, 3) the flap is potentially sensate because the lateral femoral cutaneous nerve can be used, 4) the skin territory of the anterolateral thigh flap is very long and wide (about 25 cm long and 18 cm wide), 5) the donor is far from the head and neck regions, and 6) the donor site is hidden and therefore more acceptable to the patient\(^ {34}\). The disadvantages of this flap are: 1) The anatomy of the pedicle vessels is irregular, 2) the flap has hair follicles in male patients, and 3) a large flap will result in a significant donor scar owing to skin grafts\(^ {3}\).

The anterolateral thigh flap seems to be suitable for the coverage of defects that require a thin and relatively large mobile flap, especially for defects in the head and neck regions\(^ {5}\). Indications for this flap are application in the management of deep, extensive facial skin defects, such as those of the buccal mucosa and skin.

In conclusion, we believe that the anterolateral thigh flap is suitable material for the reconstruction of extensive defects of the head and neck.

REFERENCES


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