

The trapezius is one of two large superficial muscles that extend longitudinally from the occipital bone to the lower thoracic vertebrae and laterally to the spine of the scapula (shoulder blade). Its functions are to move the scapulae and support the arm.

The trapezius has three functional regions: the superior region (descending part), which supports the weight of the arm; the intermediate region (transverse part), which retracts the scapulae; and the inferior region (ascending part), which medially rotates and depresses the scapulae.

The trapezius muscle flap is not usually the first reconstructive option for skin and soft tissue defects in the posterior neck and scalp due to surgeons' unfamiliarity with the surgical anatomy and developments in free tissue transfer techniques. The goals of a study were to describe the clinical use of trapezius flaps in posterior neck and scalp reconstruction, and to investigate the vascular anatomy of trapezius flaps in Asians in order to obtain information facilitating the safe design and elevation of flaps in which most of the muscle is preserved.

A retrospective chart review was performed of 10 patients who underwent trapezius muscle flap for posterior neck and scalp defects. We also performed an anatomical study of 16 flaps harvested from 8 preserved Asian adult cadavers and evaluated the main landmarks relevant for trapezius muscle flap.

In the anatomical study, the mean vertical height from the inferior angle of the scapula to the point at which the superficial cervical artery penetrated the trapezius was 4.31 ± 2.14 cm. The mean vertical height of the trapezius muscle flap pivot point was 9.53 ± 2.08 cm from the external occipital protuberance. Among the 10 flaps, partial necrosis on the overlaid skin graft occurred in 1 patient and postoperative seroma occurred in another patient.

Vascular variations in the trapezius muscle flap are uncommon in Asians, but when present, such variations appear to have little impact on harvesting the flap or on its circulation. The trapezius muscle flap is a viable alternative for posterior neck and scalp reconstruction.¹⁾

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Yang HJ, Lee DH, Kim YW, Lee SG, Cheon YW. The Trapezius Muscle Flap: A Viable Alternative for Posterior Scalp and Neck Reconstruction. Arch Plast Surg. 2016 Nov;43(6):529-535. PubMed PMID: 27896183.

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Last update: **2024/06/07 02:57**

