

Understanding Your Recovery

Total Knee Replacement

AS A PATIENT, your role after knee replacement surgery is key to a speedy and successful recovery. Everyone's healing time is different; however, it usually takes between 3 and 6 months to recover from knee replacement surgery, and up to one year in some cases. Most artificial knee joints are still functioning well after 15 years.

Recovery

After surgery, you can expect to fully straighten your leg and bend your knee for climbing stairs or sitting in a chair. Kneeling may be difficult and you may not have the full range of motion in your knee that you did before surgery. It is normal to hear some clicking in your knee when you walk or bend your knee, and this clicking sound usually goes away over time.

Home Care

After your surgery, it is important that you follow your healthcare provider's instructions. There are simple things you can do to help your knee heal at home:



ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Use your walker or crutches as instructed by your healthcare provider. You may also be instructed to use an assistive device for dressing, such as a reacher, or an adjustable commode seat.



HOME MODIFICATION

Simple changes to your home environment can make your recovery easier. Place frequently used items on counter tops within easy reach. Your provider may recommend that you install grab bars in your shower or use a shower bench to make transfers safe and easy. Prevent falls by removing hazards like throw rugs and electrical cords to help increase your safety.



LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Contact your provider before you start driving again. You can expect to return to driving after about 4 to 6 weeks, depending on which leg is affected by surgery and the type of car you drive. Resume sexual activity when it is right for you; there are generally no restrictions on when you can have sexual relations following total knee replacement.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Continue your physical therapy exercises to increase your strength and flexibility. Gradually resume your daily activities around your home as soon as you can. Start with walking around your home, then progress to walking longer distances outside on level surfaces.

Pain Control

It is normal to have pain in your knee following surgery. Pain at night may persist for 8 - 12 weeks after surgery. Here are some quick tips to help reduce your knee pain:

- ▶ Use your pain medication as directed and contact your prescriber with questions.
- ▶ Elevate your entire leg on a pillow or blankets in bed for 1-2 hours each day.
- ▶ Use ice on your knee for 15-20 minutes at a time, up to once every two hours.
- ▶ Increase activities gradually as instructed by your healthcare provider.
- ▶ If you experience significant redness, pain or swelling, contact your provider immediately.

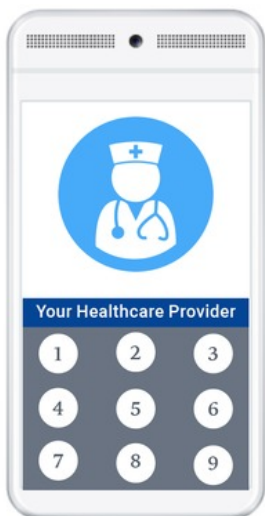


ICE REDUCES PAIN AND SWELLING

Wound Care

You will have stitches, staples, or glue in the skin around your incision for up to 14 days after surgery. It is important to keep a clean, dry dressing on your incision until the staples are removed. Change the dressing if it becomes wet or dirty.

If your wound is draining (leaking) and your dressings are soaked, let your surgeon know. There should be no new drainage from the knee incision starting 3 to 4 days after surgery. Check with your surgeon about bathing or showering after your surgery.



Contact Your Healthcare Provider if You Experience:

- Redness, pain, swelling, or tenderness in your knee
- Excessive blood soaking through your dressing, or the bleeding does not stop when pressure is applied
- Pain that worsens over time or does not go away with pain medicine
- Fluid draining from your incision
- Your temperature is over 100 degrees Fahrenheit

Go to the **Emergency Room** if You Experience:

- Chest pain, uncontrolled coughing, or shortness of breath

Activity and Movement



Begin walking as soon as you are able to



You will be given an exercise program to do every day



Using a reacher can make daily activities easier

Walking is one of the best exercises you can do for your new joint. Start with walking around your home, then gradually progress to walking longer distances on level surfaces. Your healthcare provider will tell you if you need to limit how much weight you can put on your new joint. You may be instructed to use a walker or cane. It is important to follow these and other safety instructions after surgery, such as using a handrail when you go up and down steps.

Stretching and strengthening exercises are some of the best ways to get the most movement and function out of your total joint surgery. Your therapy team will teach you ways of staying safe and making daily life easier. You may be advised to use a shoe horn or a reacher to reach objects on the floor or high in the cupboards.

Taking your medications as prescribed can make it easier for you to complete your exercises, participate in therapy, and return to your daily activities.

Pain Management



Take your pain medications as prescribed



Elevate your whole leg to help reduce pain

It is normal to have pain following your total joint surgery. This pain should gradually decrease as you heal, and there are steps you can take to ease the pain during your recovery. Your doctor may prescribe pain medications, and it is important to take these as prescribed. Pain medication can help you engage fully in exercise or therapy, especially if taken before participating.

Swelling can be a cause of pain in the healing joint. Elevate your leg, including your foot, by propping it up on pillows or blankets. Be sure to raise your leg above your heart to help reduce swelling.

Applying an ice pack to your new knee or hip for 10-20 minutes, every hour or two as needed can also ease pain. Be sure to place a towel or pillowcase between your skin and the ice pack to protect your skin.

Although you may be excited to use your new joint, you also need to take breaks in the beginning as you heal. If you increase your walking or other activities, give yourself an extra rest break to let your body recover.

Wound Care and Infection Prevention



Always clean your hands before touching the wound or wound dressings.



Check your wound area every day for signs of infection.

The cut the surgeon made to repair your joint is called the incision, and it may take 6-8 weeks to fully heal. Always clean your hands or be sure your caregiver cleans their hands with warm soapy water, before touching the wound or wound dressings.

If you have staples or stitches along your incision, keep the area covered with a clean, dry dressing to prevent rubbing or irritation. Staples will be removed at a follow-up appointment, and stitches will either be removed by your provider or absorbed by the body, depending on the type. Strips of tape that cover the incision may be carefully removed or fall off on their own. If you are given silver dressings, be sure to keep them on until your provider removes them or says it's okay to remove them yourself.

Until your incision is fully closed, preventing infection is very important, so be sure to check the area every day for signs of infection. Be sure to alert your healthcare provider if you notice an increase in drainage, green or yellow drainage, redness around the incision or joint, swelling, develop a high fever, or have a significant change in your pain levels.

Red Flags



With any surgery, there are potential complications.



Contact your provider with any questions or concerns.

You can help your recovery by alerting your healthcare provider about any concerns.

One of the risks to your new, healing joint is an infection. Be sure to alert your healthcare provider if you notice an increase in drainage, green or yellow drainage, redness around the incision or joint, swelling, develop a high fever, or have a significant change in your pain levels.

You will be given special medication to lower the risk of a blood clot, so be sure that you understand and take your medications as instructed. If you notice increased redness or swelling in your calf, sharp pain in your calf, or develop shortness of breath, contact your medical provider immediately.

Some people may react to medications, so be sure to let your healthcare provider know if you are experiencing excessive bleeding from your incision, dizziness, redness or swelling in your calf, constipation, excessive fatigue, nausea or vomiting, or any new symptoms that may be related to your medication use.

Contact your healthcare provider if you notice excessive blood soaking through your dressing, or the bleeding does not stop when pressure is applied. Go to the emergency room immediately if you experience chest pain, uncontrolled coughing, or shortness of breath.