

# Care After a Hip or Knee Replacement

## After Visit Summary

Your health care team will work with you to understand any challenges you may have after your hospital stay. This information will help you care for yourself after leaving the hospital.

## What to Expect After Surgery

- It can take a while to heal after surgery. Recovery is different for each person
- Swelling after surgery is common. You may experience the most swelling 7 to 10 days after surgery.
- You will likely have a decrease in energy after surgery. Make sure to balance your activity with rest and continue with your home exercise program.
- You will have some pain, discomfort and stiffness after surgery. Follow your surgeon's instructions for pain medicine.
- You may feel some numbness in the skin around your incision. This should get better over time.
- You may not feel like eating for the first few weeks after surgery. However, good nutrition is essential for your recovery.
- You may have constipation. This can be caused by taking pain medicine. Talk with your surgeon about ways to manage constipation.

## Pain Relief

- Your pain should lessen every week. There are many ways you can ease your pain:
  - Raise (elevate) your leg above the level of your heart by placing a pillow under your calf or ankle, not your knee.
  - Apply a cold pack to your incision after activities such as exercises or walking. This can help reduce swelling and pain.
    - Use a clean, dry towel on your skin before you place the cold pack.
    - Leave the cold pack on for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
    - Elevate your legs and use cold packs several times throughout the day.
  - Take your prescription pain medicine as instructed by your surgeon. Call your surgeon's office if you have any questions about your medicine.
- Taking prescription pain medicine can cause constipation.
  - Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of liquids each day. Water is your best choice.
  - Eat more high-fiber foods such as whole-grain bread, bran cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables.
  - Be as active as you can each day. Follow your surgeon's instructions for exercise.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking your prescription pain medicine.

**(over)**

- Take your pain medicine with food to help prevent an upset stomach.
- Slowly cut back (taper) on your pain medicine once you can cope with the pain by using other ways to manage your pain.
  - For example, if your pain is at a 5 or less on the pain scale, you could take 1 tablet instead of 2 tablets.
  - You could also go longer between your doses of pain medicine to help you cut back. For example, take 1 tablet every 6 hours instead of every 4 hours.

## Activity

- Follow your surgeon and physical therapist's instructions for using a walker, crutches or cane.
  - Follow the weight-bearing restrictions your therapist taught you.
  - Follow your surgeon's instructions for bending, twisting and other activities.
  - Do not lie on the side of your body that had surgery until your surgeon says it is OK. (For example, if you had a left hip replacement, do not lie on your left side).
  - Your surgeon will tell you when it's OK for you to drive, return to work, exercise and lift.
  - You can resume sexual activity when you are ready. Be the passive partner for the first 6 weeks after surgery. Visit [recoversex.com](http://recoversex.com) for more information about resuming sexual activity after surgery.
  - You can take a shower as soon as you feel confident to do so.
  - Do not take a tub bath until your surgeon says it is OK. (This also includes swimming in pools or lakes and using hot tubs.)
  - Follow your surgeon's instructions for exercises and activity.
  - Do not sit for longer than 1 hour without standing, stretching or taking a few steps.
  - Alternate rest and activity.
- Get regular activity. Walk around your home 5 times each day. Trips to the bathroom or kitchen are not enough. Gradually increase the distance you walk. Work up to walking outside and in the community.
  - Put on your shoes and socks as instructed.
  - Avoid tobacco and secondhand smoke. They can slow your recovery.

## Incision Care

- You may go home with a waterproof dressing covering your incision. You can shower with this dressing on if the edges are not peeling back.
- If you do not have a waterproof dressing and you still have staples or stitches, you can cover your incision with plastic to keep it dry while taking a shower.
- Do not put any lotions, creams, salves, powders or ointment on your incision site.
- Do not remove your dressing before your follow-up appointment with your surgeon. If more than half of your dressing is saturated or it is peeling off, please call your surgeon's office and you will be given instructions on how to care for your dressing.
- Your dressing and stitches or staples will be removed at your follow-up appointment.
- Ask your surgeon when your incision can get wet.

## Food and Beverages

- Try to resume eating healthful meals and snacks as soon as you are able.
- Make sure to drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of liquids each day and include protein (meat, poultry, fish, beans, nuts and seeds) in your meals and snacks to help your body heal.

## Important Reminders

- Call your surgeon before you have any routine dental visits or any work done. There is bacteria (germs) in your teeth or gums that can be released into your bloodstream and affect your new joint.
- To help prevent falls at home:
  - Create a clear walking path by removing throw rugs and electrical cords so you do not trip over them.
  - Keep your phone within reach in case you need to call for help.
  - Always wear non-slip socks or supportive shoes while walking (even inside).
  - Make sure you have good lighting and use a night light to help with getting up in the middle of the night.

## When to Call Your Surgeon

Call your **surgeon** if you have:

- a temperature of 101.6 F or higher
- problems or signs of infection at your incision site such as:
  - increased pain
  - increased swelling
  - increased redness
  - odor
  - warmth
  - green or yellow discharge
- any change in your ability to move such as new weakness, or not being able to move your arm or leg
- signs and symptoms of a blood clot including pain, swelling, tenderness, warmth or redness in the back of one or both lower legs (calves)
- any change in sensation such as new numbness or tingling

- any unusual bruising or bleeding
- severe pain not relieved by medicine, rest or ice
- any problems, questions or concerns related to your surgery.

## When to Call Your Primary Care Provider

Call your **primary care provider** if you have:

- feelings of being dizzy or lightheaded
- an upset stomach (nausea) and throwing up (vomiting) that will not stop
- any bowel problems such as constipation or bloody stools
- any problems urinating such as burning, urgency or frequency
- any other problems, questions or concerns.

**Call 911 or have someone take you to the nearest hospital Emergency Department if you have any chest pain, trouble breathing or shortness of breath.**

## Follow-up Appointment

Please keep all follow-up appointments with your primary care provider or specialist, even if you are feeling well.