



Considerations Following a Total Joint Replacement

Nutrition

Following your surgery, you may have less of an appetite both due to pain and the medications you are taking to manage your pain. Some patients benefit from drinking meal replacement shakes like Ensure or homemade smoothies. Poor nutritional intake can contribute to general fatigue, headaches, and low energy. Proper nutrition is also crucial to the healing process.

Medications

It is important for pain to be well-managed following surgery as this is necessary for completing the proper therapy. If pain is not controlled, it could limit your ability to make faster gains in strength and mobility. People often try to discontinue their pain medications too early because they don't like the way it makes them feel, or they are having too many side effects. If this is the case, please discuss alternatives with your physician or therapist. Sometimes just altering the dosage or trying a different medication altogether can have a large impact.

Constipation

It is very common to experience irregular bowel movements following any joint replacement, or surgery for that matter, as narcotics for pain management can slow peristalsis (the rippling motion of the intestine as it passes food). This is compounded by diminished activity and altered appetite. These issues can be addressed by being sure to drink plenty of water. You may also benefit from taking an over-the-counter fiber supplement or stool softener. Even moderate constipation can contribute to increased pain and feeling poor in general.

Kneeling

Whether or not you may kneel on your new knee is up to your doctor. This decision is based on many factors including bone quality, body weight, overall health, type of prosthetic joint, and additional surgeries on that extremity. Each physician has his or her idea as to whether or not kneeling on a prosthetic knee will be acceptable. If your physician allows you to kneel afterward, consider the use of a piece of foam or other cushion to make it more comfortable.

Travel

Some people plan on a vacation within a month or two of having a joint replacement. The recommendation is to discuss your plans with your physician. Even if you are feeling well enough to travel a month after surgery, there are other considerations to be mindful of such as the risk of blood clots and the degree of physical demand needed for your trip.

Question & Answer

Can I hurt my knee after a replacement with too much activity?

One thing to be mindful of is avoiding a fall. Beyond this, it is extremely unlikely that you will do anything to injure the prosthesis or surgical procedure itself. Muscle soreness after exercise or other activity is not always a bad thing. It often means you challenged the muscle enough to give it a good work out and make it stronger for the next time. However, this soreness should be able to be alleviated with ice or dissipate after an hour or two. If soreness persists into the next day or the knee becomes more swollen, the activity was likely too much or too strenuous. If this occurs, decrease the intensity next time and discuss it with your physical therapist next visit.

When can I go in a hot tub or take a hot bath following surgery?

This again should be discussed with your physician. Some suggest avoiding a hot tub or soaking in a hot bath for up to a year after surgery. Other physicians strictly wait a month or two to avoid the likelihood of the warmth attributing to increased edema and increasing the effects of a blood thinner.

How long will the stiffness and swelling be present, (specifically for knee replacements)?

The surgical knee may always appear slightly larger than the other. However, do not be surprised if it takes a full year for the swelling to go away. Also, it is very common that some degree of stiffness will linger for a year. Even if the knee feels loose and mobile, sitting for a period may allow it to tighten up, requiring a couple steps before it loosens again once you get up and move again.

When can I drive?

The final decision of when you can drive is up to your physician. Getting back behind the wheel will of course take longer if surgery was on the right leg. However, even if surgery was on the left leg and the right is fully functional, the effects of your medication also need to be considered. Pain medications can affect your response time and awareness while blood thinners leave you more susceptible to heavy bleeding if injury were to occur.

How long should I follow my hip precautions after a hip replacement?

Yet again, this is up to your physician so be sure to clarify it with him or her. Some physicians suggest maintaining them for a year, while others want you to do so indefinitely.