



Coastal Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine

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Activities After a Knee Replacement

If you are a candidate for knee replacement surgery, you probably anticipate that life after the surgery will be much like life before it, only without the pain. In many ways, you are correct. But change doesn't happen overnight and your active participation in the healing process is necessary to ensure a successful outcome.

Although you will be able to resume most activities, you should avoid activities that place excessive stress on the new knee. The following suggestions will help you adapt to your new joint and resume your daily activities safely.

Activities in the hospital

The knee is the largest joint in the body, and replacing it is major surgery. Although you will probably want to take it easy at first, early mobilization is important. If you had considerable pain in your knee, you probably cut back on your activities before surgery and your leg muscles may be weak. You will need to build up strength in your quadriceps muscles to develop control of your new joint.

Proper pain management is important in your early recovery. Although pain after surgery is quite variable and not entirely predictable, it can be controlled with medication. Initially, you will probably receive pain control medication through an intravenous (IV) connection. You don't have to worry about becoming dependent on the medication; after a day or two, injections or pills will replace the IV. You will also be receiving injections of a blood-thinning medication to help prevent blood clots from forming in the veins of your thighs and calves.

You may lose your appetite and feel nauseous or constipated for a couple of days. These are normal reactions. You may be given stool softeners or laxatives to ease the constipation caused by the pain medication. You will be taught to do breathing exercises to prevent congestion from developing in your chest and lungs.

Initially you will have a bulky dressing around the knee and a drain to remove any fluid build up around the knee. The drain will be removed in a day or two. Usually a physical therapist will visit you on the day after surgery and begin teaching you how to use your knee. You may be fitted with a continuous passive motion (CPM) machine that will slowly and smoothly straighten and bend your knee. Even as you lie in bed, you can

“pedal” your feet and “pump” your ankles on a regular basis to promote blood flow in your legs.

Discharge

You may experience mild swelling in your leg after you are discharged. Elevating the leg and applying an ice pack for 15 to 20 minutes at a time will help to reduce the swelling. You may choose to temporarily be transferred to a rehabilitation center. When you are ready to be discharged home, the following tips can make your homecoming more comfortable.

1. Rearrange furniture so you can maneuver with a walker. You may temporarily change rooms (make the living room your bedroom, for example) to avoid using the stairs.
2. Remove any throw or area rugs that could cause you slip. Securely fasten electrical Cords around the perimeter of the room.
3. Install a shower chair, gripping bar and raised toilet seat in the bathroom.

Activities at home

General guidelines include:

1. Keep the incision clean and dry. A dressing will be applied in the hospital and should be changed daily. This will be done by the nurses in the rehab facility or by the home health nurses.
2. Do not shower or bathe until the staples are removed, usually 10 days after surgery.
3. Notify the doctor if the wound appears red or begins to drain.
4. Notify the doctor for a temperature > 100.5 F for more than 24 hours.
5. Swelling is normal for the first 3 to 6 months after surgery. Elevate the leg above the heart and apply ice if necessary.
6. Calf pain, chest pain or shortness of breath are signs of a possible blood clot. Call the doctor immediately if you notice any of these symptoms.

Resuming normal activities: Once you get home, you should continue to stay active. The key is to remember not to overdo it! While you can expect some good days and some bad days, you should notice a gradual improvement and a gradual increase in your endurance over the next 6 to 12 months. Here is a general list of common sense Do's and Don'ts:

1. Do take pain medication as prescribed
2. Do walk frequently in your home.
3. Don't walk without your walker.
4. Do ice for 20 minutes after exercising
5. Don't sleep with your knee propped in a bent position.
6. Do your exercises as directed by your physical therapist.
7. You may weight bear as tolerated. Never kneel on the surgical knee.
8. Do not cut back on your exercises if you have increased pain after exercising, but tell your therapist and don't stop doing exercises completely.
9. Do not take a shower until the therapist tells you that it is safe.
10. You may not drive for approximately 3 months after surgery.