

Discharge Instructions for Total Knee Replacement



You have had knee replacement surgery. The knee joint forms where the thighbone, shinbone, and kneecap meet. The knee joint is supported by muscles and ligaments. It's lined with a cushioning called cartilage. Over time, cartilage wears away. This can make the knee feel stiff and painful. Your surgeon replaced your painful joint with an artificial joint to relieve pain and restore movement. Here are some directions to follow once at home.

Home care

- Follow your surgeon's directions on when it's OK to shower. Carefully wash your incision as directed. Rinse the incision (cut) well. Then gently pat it dry. Don't rub the incision, or apply creams or lotions. Sit on a shower stool or chair when you shower to keep from falling.
- Take all medicine as directed by your surgeon.

Sitting and sleeping

- Sit in chairs with arms. The arms make it easier for you to stand up or sit down.
- Don't sit for more than 30 to 45 minutes at a time.
- Nap if you are tired, but don't stay in bed all day.
- Sleep with a pillow under your ankle, not your knee. Be sure to change the position of your leg during the night.

Moving safely

- The key to successful recovery is movement with walking and exercising your knee as directed by your healthcare provider. You should be able to start moving your leg shortly after surgery as directed by your surgeon.
- Walk up and down stairs with support. Try 1 step at a time. Use the railing if possible.
- Don't drive until your healthcare provider says it's OK. Most people can start driving about 6 weeks after surgery. Don't drive while you are taking opioid pain medicine.

Other precautions

- Don't soak your knee in water until your surgeon says it's OK. This means no hot tubs, bathtubs, or swimming pools.
- You may be given support stockings. If so, wear them as directed by your surgeon. These may be needed for 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. If needed, you can place a bandage over the incision to prevent irritation from clothing or support stockings.
- Arrange your household to keep the items you need handy. Keep everything else out of the way. Remove items that may cause you to fall, such as throw rugs and electrical cords.
- Use nonslip bathmats, grab bars, an elevated toilet seat, and a shower chair in your bathroom.
- Until your balance, flexibility, and strength improve, use a cane, crutches, a walker, handrails, or someone to help you.

- Keep your hands free by using a backpack, fanny pack, apron, or pockets to carry things.
- Prevent infection. Ask your healthcare provider for instructions if you haven't already received them. Any infection will need to be treated right away. Call your healthcare provider right away if you think you might have an infection.
- Tell your dentist that you have an artificial joint. You may be directed to take antibiotics as prescribed before any dental work.
- Tell all your healthcare providers about your artificial joint before any medical procedure.
- Stay at a healthy weight. Get help to lose any extra pounds. Added body weight puts stress on the knee.
- Take any medicine you may have been given after surgery as prescribed. This may include blood-thinning medicine to prevent blood clots or antibiotics to prevent infection.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider as advised. If you have staples or stitches to close your incision, follow your surgeon's instructions on when to return to have them removed, usually about 2 to 3 weeks after surgery.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if either of the following occur:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Pain or swelling in your calf
- Shaking chills
- Stiffness or inability to move the knee
- Increased swelling in your leg
- Increased redness, tenderness, or swelling in or around the knee incision
- Drainage from the knee incision
- Increased knee pain

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