 Recovering from Hip or Knee Joint Replacement Surgery

How to Care for Yourself at Home
For more detailed information refer to the “Before, during and after joint replacement surgery booklet”. If there is a difference between the information in this pamphlet and instructions from your surgeon, follow the instructions from your surgeon.
Protecting your joint?

It is important that you strictly follow activity restrictions to prevent dislocation or loosening of your new joint.

Signs of hip joint dislocation

• The leg is suddenly extremely painful, short and the hip cannot be moved
• You might feel the hip come out of joint
• If this happens, call an ambulance immediately

How much weight can I put on much operated leg?

☐ full or ___________________(as indicated by your surgeon)
☐ partial - up to 50% of your weight
☐ feather - just a light touch
☐ non-weight bearing

What activities can I do at home?

• Most people are able to resume their normal activities within three months
• Talk to your physiotherapist before starting any new activity. Take it easy the first few weeks after surgery. Balance your activity with rest periods.
• Walking is important to prevent blood clots. Increase the distance you walk each day or according to your physiotherapist’s instructions
• After a knee replacement, it is important to do range of motion exercises even though you may have some pain. If you find your exercises are painful, take pain medication 30 minutes before exercising. Remember, range of motion is more important than strength early on. Once range of motion is achieved, then you can work on strength
• If pain is preventing your activity, sleep and/or exercise, talk to your physiotherapist and/or surgeon
• If pain increases for more than two hours after exercise, cut back a bit and talk to your physiotherapist
• Elevate your leg and use covered ice packs on the joint during the day to reduce swelling and pain
• Avoid bending forward, sitting in a low chair, twisting, stooping or getting in and out of bath tubs as these activities put too much pressure on the healing joint
• Avoid crossing your legs as this may cause blood clots or affect the healing joint
• For information about driving a car, getting in and out of a car, daily exercises, recreational activity guidelines, avoiding falls and positioning for sexual activity etc refer to the booklet “Before During and After Joint Replacement Surgery”
How do I position my leg when lying down?

- You may sleep on your back or either side.
- **Total hip replacement/resurfacing** – when you lie on your side, keep two pillows between your legs for the first three months.
- **Total knee replacement/resurfacing** – when lying on your back never place a pillow under the knee of your operated leg. You may use a pillow between your legs when lying on your side.

How do I control my pain at home?

You may have some temporary pain in the new joint because your muscles are weak from not being used. Your pain will gradually become less over the next six weeks to three months.

To control your pain:

- Follow the instructions given to you with your pain medication.
- Take your pain medication on a regular basis, rather than waiting until the pain is bad.
- For the first few weeks at home, try taking two extra strength Tylenol® tablets every six hours on a regular basis. **Do not take more than 8 Tylenol® tablets a day.** If you are taking Tylenol Arthritis® (long acting) do not take more than 6 tablets a day. The medical name of Tylenol is acetaminophen. Many medications contain this drug. The maximum safe dose is 4000 mg per day. If you are taking medications that contain acetaminophen, you should cut back on Tylenol® so that you do not exceed the maximum safe daily dose. An overdose may lead to liver damage.
- If you are taking Tylenol® and your pain still interferes with your sleep, activity, mood or appetite, also take the prescribed pain medication on a regular basis as well as the Tylenol®. Unless the prescribed medication contains Tylenol® – such as Tylenol #3®, then you may take the prescribed medication, in addition to Extra-strength Tylenol®.
- An anti-inflammatory medication may also be prescribed for pain, but avoid taking them if you are taking blood thinners. Also, they may interfere with bone ingrowth and it is best to not take them if you have cementless implants, such as a hip replacement.
- You may also wish to take pain medication before having your staples taken out.
- Use covered (pillow case) ice packs on the painful area for 30 minutes at a time. A bag of frozen peas or corn may be used.
- Relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or meditation may also help relieve the pain.
What can I do to reduce swelling?

You can expect to have swelling for the first few weeks after surgery. To help reduce swelling, elevate your legs whenever possible and do the foot pumping exercise you learned in the hospital. If you have excessive swelling in your calf or leg you may have a blood clot and should see your family doctor as soon as possible.

What can I do to prevent blood clots?

Blood clots in the legs can occur at any time within the first three months after surgery. Blood clots cause the leg (calf) to swell and may cause pain in the leg.

To prevent blood clots you may need to have a blood thinner injection such as low molecular weight heparin (LMWH)

It is very important to:

• Give yourself the LMWH injections at the same time each day for the number of days prescribed by your surgeon
• Walk short distances at least once an hour
• While you are seated or in bed, twirl your ankles and do foot pumps (point your foot like a ballerina and pull your toes up in the direction of your nose)
• Tighten your calf, thigh and buttock muscles frequently. Do these exercises starting at the feet and moving up the leg to the buttocks.

Anemia (low hemoglobin/low iron in your blood)

If you have anemia following surgery, it is recommended that you take an iron supplement if your iron stores are low. For the most part, it is safe for patients to take iron supplements. These may cause side effects such as stomach upset or constipation. If you are concerned about taking iron, please see your family doctor.

The signs of anemia are:

• feeling dizzy
• feeling faint
• severe fatigue
• shortness of breath
• rapid pulse

If you have these signs, you need to see your family doctor. Blood transfusions are not recommended unless your haemoglobin is very low and you have a heart condition.

It is important to eat food high in iron to help correct the anemia and give you more strength and energy. Foods high in iron include, red meat such as beef, organ meats such as liver, fish, poultry, some canned shellfish such as clams and oyster, beans, tofu, fortified whole grains, and leafy green vegetables.

You can improve the absorption of iron from non-animal food by including a good source of vitamin C when you eat your meal. For example include citrus juice with the meal. Avoid grapefruit juice if you are taking blood pressure medication.
What can I do to prevent and manage constipation at home?

If you have not had a bowel movement for three days or have the urge but are unable to move your bowels, you may be at risk for severe constipation.

Take a preventative approach:

Step 1
- Eat more fiber (fruit, including dried fruit, vegetables, whole wheat bread, cereals and bran)
- Drink plenty of fluids-at least 8 glasses a day. Fluids can include water, juices, soup, tea and other drinks.

Step 2
- Take a laxative such as Glysennid® or Sennokot® at breakfast and dinner for 2 days
- If you have not had a bowel movement within 2 days go to step 3

Step 3
- Use a suppository such as Glycerin®. Keep the suppository in for at least 20 minutes. If you are still unable to have a bowel movement after the suppository, go to step 4

Step 4
- Use a Fleet® enema. If the Fleet® enema does not produce a bowel movement talk to your doctor. Laxatives are meant for short-term use only, do not use for longer than 1 week. Laxatives, suppositories and Fleet® enemas can be bought at any Pharmacy.

What can I do to improve wound healing?

Eat protein (meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans and nuts) for your body to heal after surgery. You need at least three serving of these foods each day, in addition to 3 servings of dairy products daily. Please refer to Canada’s Food Guide at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
How do I take care of my wound (incision)?

- You do not need a dressing over your wound if there is no drainage. However, you may find it more comfortable to use a dressing.
- **Your staples should be removed 10 to 14 days after your surgery.** Arrange this with your family doctor, a nurse or physiotherapist and be sure to give them the staple remover given to you by the hospital.
- For dressing change refer to the booklet “Before, During and After Joint Replacement surgery”
- You may shower when your wound is dry and no longer draining. Gently pat the area dry.
- Do not take a tub bath, go swimming or use a hot tub until your staples have been removed and the wound has healed

**Signs of infection**

- New drainage, green or yellow or foul smelling from the wound or drain site
- Increased and spreading redness around the wound or drain site
- Bruising around the incision and lower down in the leg is normal and is not a cause for concern
- Increased pain or swelling of wound site and surrounding area
- Increased temperature above (fever) 38°C or 101°F after the first week after surgery
- If you have a sore throat, bladder infection (frequent urination, pain, burning, foul smelling cloudy urine) or any other signs of infection, it is important to see your family doctor as soon as possible to prevent infection from spreading to your new joint
- **You should never start antibiotics for a presumed infection without talking to your surgeon**

**Follow-up with your surgeon**

Contact your surgeon’s office as soon as you get home to schedule a follow-up appointment:

- Knee Replacement surgery see your surgeon at 2 to 4 weeks after surgery
- Hip Replacement surgery see your surgeon at 4 to 6 weeks after surgery

However, if you have any concerns, you should feel free to contact your surgeon.
It is important to see your family doctor or surgeon as soon as possible if any of the following occur:

Call your surgeon for:

- Joint dislocation (see page 1)
- Any new or increased, pain, redness, swelling, warmth, drainage (green or yellow and/or foul smelling) from the wound or drain site (may be an infection)
- Fever above 38°C or 101°F (may be an infection)

Call your family doctor for:

- Pain, and or redness in your calf in the operated leg and/or excessive swelling of the calf, thigh, foot or ankle (may be a blood clot)
- Dizziness, fainting, severe fatigue, rapid pulse or shortness of breath (may be anemia)

Call 911

If you have sudden chest pain or shortness of breath (may be a blood clot in your lungs called a pulmonary embolus)

Important information about medical or dental procedures:

It is very important that you tell your dentist and other medical people that you have had a joint replacement. Before you have minor surgery or dental work, you will be put on antibiotic to prevent an infection spreading to your new joint. Typically this is one dose of antibiotic 2 hours prior to the procedure, including routine dental cleaning.

If you have any questions worries or concerns:

HealthLink BC: 8-1-1
Translation services are available in 130 languages.
Deaf and Hearing impaired: 7-1-1
www.healthlinkbc.ca