

Home Care After Total Joint Replacement

Follow these guidelines for care as your new joint heals over the next 6 to 8 weeks. Do not try to overdo or push yourself beyond the limits of pain.

Home Care

- You will leave the hospital 1 to 3 days after surgery. Home care instructions will be reviewed with you. You will need a follow-up appointment. You will either be given a date or a telephone number to call for an appointment.
- Your medicines may change after surgery. You will be given prescriptions for new medicines and instructed on which medicines to continue after your surgery.
- Use your walker or cane as instructed.
- You need help when you go home. If needed, your health care team will help you make arrangements for home care, equipment, physical therapy or an extended care facility.

Call your doctor if you have:

- Increased redness, swelling or drainage at the incision
- A fever of 101 degrees F or more
- Edges of the wound that start to separate
- Pain, tingling, numbness or coldness of the leg
- Your leg turns pale or blue in color

Care of Your Incision

- Your incision may be closed with staples, stitches or special tapes called steri-strips.

- Wash your incision with soap and water and pat dry.
- Staples or stitches will be taken out at your follow up visit. Steri-strips will begin to fall off in 7-10 days. If they have not fallen off after 2 weeks, you can gently pull them off.

Swelling

- Swelling in the foot, ankle, knee and thigh are common after total joint replacement.
- To prevent swelling, elevate your feet higher than the level of your heart for 45 to 60 minutes. Do this 2 times each day.
- If the swelling does not decrease after sleeping all night and elevating your legs during the day, **call your doctor**.
- Your doctor may want you to wear the elastic stockings to reduce swelling. If so, wear the stockings during the day and remove them at night. Wash the stockings with soap and water and hang them to dry. Have someone help you put the stockings on and off.

Blood Thinning Medicines

- Your doctor may order blood thinning medicine for 1 to 3 weeks to reduce your risk of blood clots. This medicine is most often given as an injection into the abdomen. You will be taught how to give this medicine.
- Aspirin and other arthritis medicines are also blood thinners so **do not** take aspirin or products with aspirin while you are on these injections.

Sitting

- Do not sit for longer than 30 minutes at a time. Get up, walk and change your position.
- During long car trips, stop every 30 minutes. Get out of the car and move around. This will prevent blood clots, decrease swelling and help decrease joint stiffness.

Walking

- Use your walker or cane with all activity so that you do not fall.
- **Do not walk without your walker or cane until your doctor tells you that it is okay.**
- Walk often on level ground and go outdoors if weather permits. Shopping malls are good places to walk during rainy weather.

Sleeping

- Do not use a waterbed until approved by your doctor.
- If you had a hip replacement, do not sleep on your side where the surgery was done.

Climbing Stairs

- During the first few weeks at home, you may go up and down stairs one time each day with help.
- Have a friend or family member stand behind you as you go up and in front of you as you come down. Hold onto the hand rail.

Sexual Activity

- After knee replacement, you may return to sexual activity as soon as you feel able.
- After hip replacement, you may resume sexual activity 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. It is best to be on the bottom with your legs spread apart and slightly bent. Avoid excessive hip bending or twisting. Do not rotate your leg inward. After several months of healing, you may resume sexual activity in any comfortable position.

Driving a Car

- Do not drive a car until your doctor tells you it is okay – often 6 weeks after surgery.

- Only drive if you can control your surgery leg and you are not taking pain medicine.

Water Walking

- Water walking in a pool is relaxing and strengthens the muscles in the hip and leg.
- Do not walk in water unless you have your doctor's permission and your incision is well healed – often 6 weeks after surgery.
- Enter the pool to chest high water. Hold onto the side of the pool and walk for 15 to 20 minutes. Repeat 3 to 5 days each week.

Activities After Your Joint Heals

- Your new joint can be damaged by rough treatment. Avoid activities that may cause extra stress or injure the joint such as contact sports.
- Do your exercises to keep your muscles and ligaments strong to support your joint.
- Maintain a healthy weight for your height.
- After your joint is healed, you may be able to resume dancing, swimming and other activities. Check with your doctor before you start any new activity.

Preventing Infection

- It is important to prevent and treat infections because an infection can move through the blood to your joint.
- You need to take antibiotics before having any future surgery or dental care. Call your family doctor and tell them what you are having done and get an order for antibiotics.
- Tell all of your doctors including your dentist that you have had joint replacement.

- See a dentist for care every 6 months to prevent infection from your teeth. Before your appointment, call your dentist to get an order for antibiotics.
- If you think you have an infection, call your doctor.

Talk to your health care team if you have any questions or concerns about how to care for your new joint.