

Senior Guide

TO

JOINT

REPLACEMENTS



INTRODUCTION

Many seniors undergo joint replacement surgeries to help ease pain and increase mobility. The most common joint replacements are the hip and knee. In fact, approximately 7 million Americans live with a hip or knee replacement. But other common joint replacements include shoulder, elbow, wrist, and ankle replacements. These surgeries have a high success rate and can help seniors have a better quality of life.

Before any surgery, however, it's best to understand what the surgery entails and what the recovery process looks like. This guide is designed to give seniors and their family members the information they need to achieve the best outcome from their hip or knee replacement.

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JOINT REPLACEMENT OVERVIEW

A joint is a point in the body where 2 bones meet. Over time or due to an illness or injury, joints can become stiff or painful. Joint replacement surgery may be the best treatment option to help restore a joint to normal, healthy movement.

During any joint replacement surgery, a prosthesis is designed to take the place of the joint. These can be made of metal, plastic, or even ceramic. The damaged parts of bone are removed and replaced with the prosthesis. The new joint should mimic the shape and movement of the original joint and help reduce pain and stiffness.

Let's take a closer look at the most common types of joint replacements: hip and knee replacements.

KNEE REPLACEMENT

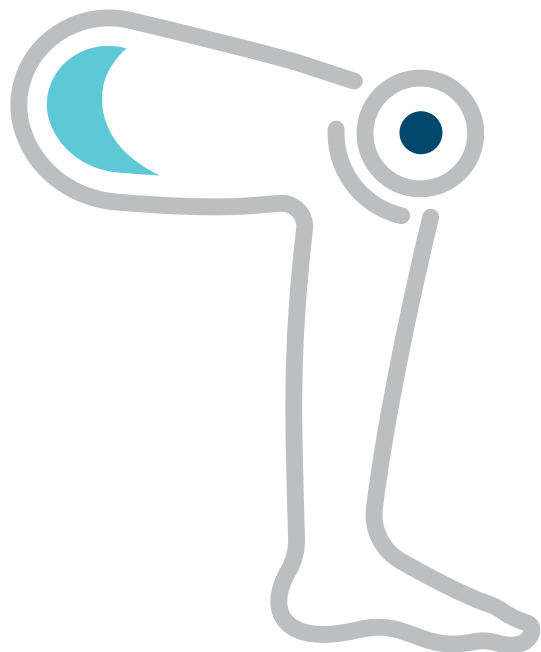
Your knee is the largest joint in the body. It is a hinge joint that bends and straightens. The joint connects the femur (thigh bone) and the tibia (shin bone), and it's protected by your patella (kneecap). To cushion your knee, there is a sac filled with lubricating fluid and spongy tissue. Over time, it's common that this cushioning layer decreases, resulting rubbing bones and painful friction.

During a knee replacement surgery, the damaged portion of the knee is removed and replaced with implants. These are placed at the top of the tibia and the bottom of the femur.

Implants can be made of various materials:

- Stainless steel
- Titanium
- Cobalt
- Polyethylene
- Chrome

The type of implant and the surgery method are largely determined by a senior's age, activity level, and overall health. Your doctor will also insert plastic plates to replace the underside of the kneecap and cartilage. Typically, your ligaments and muscles are left untouched so your knee can still bend properly.



HIP REPLACEMENT

The hip joint supports most of your weight during all types of movements. The femur has a rounded head at the top that fits securely into a socket in your pelvis. The joint is surrounded by cartilage and lubricating fluid to help create smooth movement.

If the cartilage wears out, the bones rub together, causing pain and stiffness. When this happens, surgery might be the best option.

During a hip replacement, the hip is replaced with components, or implants. These pieces include a new ball, socket, thigh stem, and a liner to facilitate movement. There are several approaches to performing this surgery.

Traditional Hip Replacement

During a traditional hip replacement surgery, your surgeon will cut through your muscles to reach your hip joint. Because of this incision, the muscle will need to heal after surgery, and you may be given a set of specific instructions to prevent hip dislocation.

Anterior Hip Replacement

Unlike a traditional hip replacement, an anterior replacement doesn't involve cutting through your muscle. Instead, the surgeon accesses the hip joint by going in between your muscles. This approach may lead to faster recovery time and fewer restrictions after





BEFORE SURGERY

Before a joint replacement surgery, there are several things that you need to consider to ensure that your surgery goes smoothly.

Maintain Your Health

Before undergoing surgery, it's important to maintain your health to the best of your ability. Quit smoking; it can decrease blood flow, shrink arteries, increase heart rate, and raise blood pressure. All of these factors can lead to health complications or a prolonged recovery.

You should also have needed dental work completed and review your medications. Some types of medicine may interfere with your surgery.

Prepare Your Home

Before you go in for a joint replacement surgery, it's important to prepare your home and ensure that you will be able to safely navigate it when you are released from the hospital or rehabilitation. Here are some suggestions to prepare your home and aid in your recovery.

- **Bathroom** If you undergo a hip, knee, or ankle replacement, you will likely need to install grab bars in your bathroom near the toilet or the shower. You might also want to consider purchasing a shower seat and an elevated toilet seat. Add no-skid mats under bathroom mats.
- **Access** Make sure everything you need to complete your daily routine is within reach so that you don't have to bend down or reach up unnecessarily.
- **Obstacles** Remove any potential hazards around your home, including rugs, cords, stools, or other items. Ensure that walkways are at least wide enough to accommodate a walker or crutches.
- **Seating** Although a recliner might seem comfortable now, it might be difficult to get out of after surgery. Make sure you have seating options that have arms to support you as you get up and down.
- **Pets** Pets may be excited to see you, which is cute but also potentially dangerous. You may need to arrange for your pet to stay with a friend or family member until you are settled.

Discuss Discharge Planning

Take care of the post-care details before you ever go in for surgery. By creating care plans ahead of time, you can reduce stress and chaos for yourself and your family.

Most likely, you will be in the hospital for 1 to 3 nights, which means most of your recovery will be at home. Under some circumstances, you might be admitted for short-term rehabilitation.

Obtain DME

Most seniors who undergo a joint replacement surgery will require some type of durable medical equipment after the procedure. If you plan to borrow or buy your own cane, walker, or crutches, do so before your surgery. Your insurance company may cover all or some of your equipment.

Set Expectations

Before undergoing any surgical procedure, you should carefully consider what the surgery can and cannot accomplish. Setting realistic recovery goals and expectations is important for your overall happiness and wellness after surgery.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Joint replacement surgery may drastically reduce pain, but that doesn't mean you will be pain free.
- There will be a lot of activities that you cannot participate in after surgery, including running, high-impact sports, or contact sports.
- Even with normal wear and tear, your joint may loosen or become painful. However, most joint replacements can last for years.



DAY OF SURGERY

The day of surgery may be filled with stress and some anxiety. But knowing what to expect on the day of your surgery can help you feel more at ease and confident about the procedure.

What to Bring

When your joint replacement surgery arrives, you don't want to be scrambling at the last minute to pack your things.

Here is a brief checklist of items to bring with you to the hospital:

- Current list of medications with dosage and frequency
- Insurance and prescription cards
- List of important contacts
- Copy of Advanced Directives
- Socks
- Toiletries
- Hearing aids
- Eyeglasses
- Shoes with non-skid soles
- Undergarments
- Loose-fitting clothing
- DME
- Phone or other electronics and chargers
- CPAP machine and equipment
- Driver's license



Check with the facility performing your surgery for more information on what you should and shouldn't bring.

Anesthesia

For your procedure, you will be given anesthesia. Your anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will discuss the types of anesthesia used during your procedure.

General Anesthesia:

This type of anesthesia puts you to sleep following an injection.

Regional Anesthesia:

This type of anesthesia numbs a specific part of your body with a local anesthetic. With regional anesthesia, you may be awake during surgery, but you will not feel any pain.

Length of Surgery

Most joint replacement surgeries take between 1 and 3 hours to complete, depending on the level of difficulty and any complications involved.





POST-SURGERY HOSPITAL CARE

While every joint replacement surgery is different, here are some common things to expect following your procedure.

Pain Management

During and after your joint replacement surgery, your doctors will most likely give you a combination of medications to help manage pain. These medications may include peripheral nerve blocks, peri-articular injections, or spinal blocks.

When you come to after surgery, you may not feel any pain at all. However, it is important that you do not try to get up by yourself. Your joint has experienced medical trauma and could become damaged. Additionally, trying to get up and move around without assistance could lead to a serious fall.

Discuss your levels of pain with your doctors and nurses. They can help adjust your medications, reposition your limbs, or offer other solutions to mitigate pain.

After being discharged from the hospital, we recommend that you continue to take your pain medications as prescribed by your doctor. It is better to stay ahead of the pain than let it get ahead of you! However, within the weeks after your surgery, your joint will heal, and you will take less medication until you don't need it anymore.

Swelling

The area that underwent surgery is likely to be swollen after surgery. However, it may settle in different areas of the body, and the amount of swelling will vary by patient. You may also notice black and blue bruises.

The swelling and bruising will gradually decrease over the months following surgery. To avoid swelling, here are some tips:

- Elevate the affected joint if possible
- Apply ice for about 20 minutes several times per day
- Reduce salt intake because sodium can cause fluid retention
- Perform exercises as directed by your physician or physical therapist

Drainage Tubes

Your surgeon may place drainage tubes at the surgical site to help remove any excess blood or fluid from the area. These tubes are typically removed the day after surgery.

The surgeon might also choose to insert a catheter, a tube placed into the bladder, during surgery. The catheter is removed 2 days after surgery at the latest. They are usually removed once you can walk to the bathroom.

Eating & Drinking

Post-surgery, you may be put on a liquid diet. But later that same day, you may return to a regular diet. It is important to stay hydrated and well-nourished to help with the healing process.

Clot Prevention

Clotting is a risk factor during any surgery. After joint replacement surgeries, clots called deep vein thromboses (DVT) may form. Though unusual, these clots can travel to the lungs, where they can cause serious symptoms.

Your doctor may prescribe medications to prevent clotting or compression garments that help put pressure on veins and decrease the chance of clotting upon discharge.

Activity

Believe it or not, your physical therapist will want to get you up and moving the day of your surgery or the next day at the latest. It's recommended to start using your new joint quickly after surgery to help with recovery.



HOSPITAL DISCHARGE

Your hospital stay may be just a few days, which means a lot of your recovery will take place at home or at a rehabilitation center. Hopefully, you have already planned who will drive you home and arranged post-surgery care.

To be discharged from the hospital, you will need to meet the following goals:

- Walk around with an assistive device
- Eat and drink normally
- Use the bathroom
- Maintain vital signs
- Tolerate pain with medication

If you cannot be discharged home, you may be discharged to a skilled nursing facility until you are able to return home safely.





RECOVERY AT HOME

Recovery won't be easy, but you will see improvement month over month. Here is a general timeline of what to expect during your home recovery.

First 48 Hours

The recovery period directly following your hospital discharge is the most crucial, because it is the time that you are most susceptible to falling or other health complications. Here are some things to keep in mind while you recover at home.

Extra Assistance

To help you remain safe, arrange assistance from a friend or a professional caregiver to help with ambulation, medication management, and performing other daily activities during the days after surgery. Plus, it's nice to have extra companionship when you're at home.

Incision Care

Your doctor will review proper incision care with you before you leave the hospital. Follow their instructions exactly to prevent an infection. If you experience increasing pain, swelling, drainage, redness, or tenderness, contact your doctor immediately.

Activity

Your level of activity will be very limited when you get home, but it will increase as you perform prescribed exercises or meet with physical or occupational therapists.

To regain your activity levels, follow these tips:

- Follow all therapy instructions.
- Maintain your confidence despite feeling weak or defeated.
- Apply ice to reduce swelling.
- Avoid sitting for longer than about 30 minutes at a time.
- Take frequent, short walks.
- Do not perform heavy lifting.
- Use assistive devices to help you get around.

First 6 Weeks

During the first 6 weeks, you may still experience pain, but your activity levels should increase. You should be making more progress each week. Here's what you can expect.

Pain Management

You will still experience some pain during the first 6 weeks, but your discomfort should greatly decrease. The further you are from surgery, the less pain you should have. It's important to take medication only as prescribed.

If you need assistance managing multiple medications, a professional caregiver can help track your medication schedule.

Driving

Driving is a sign of your independence, and it can be frustrating to have to rely on others to get around. But don't worry! Your joint will reduce in pain and stiffness so that you can drive on your own. Once you can get in and out of the car by yourself, you should be safe to drive.

Check with your doctor for any special recommendations for returning to the driver's seat, and remember that you cannot drive if you are still taking narcotic pain medication.

Sleeping

Although surgery may be in the past, you may still have difficulty sleeping due to discomfort or limited movement. This is completely normal. Try doing things that help you relax as part of your bedtime routine to help you get to sleep easier.

6 to 12 Weeks

After the first 6 weeks, you should feel an increase in energy and activity. Pain should be subsiding, and you should feel like you've made significant progress. Here's what to anticipate during the first few months after surgery.

Follow-Up Appointment

At about 6 weeks post-surgery, you will have a follow-up visit with your doctor. Your doctor may give you specific instructions to aid your recovery process, but typically, this appointment is just to check on your activity level, pain, and overall progress.

Returning to Work

Most patients can return to work between 8 and 12 weeks after surgery. However, you should not lift heavy objects, stand or sit for long periods of time, or put your joint in any type of strain. Sitting at a desk or being on your feet for long periods of time is typical of work conditions, so you'll have to adjust when returning to your work routine.

Exercise

You should feel well enough to perform light exercises. Although you may not be participating in physical therapy anymore, you should continue to strengthen your joint and regain mobility. Do not fall into the trap of stopping exercise just because you don't have regular appointments anymore.

This is just a brief outline of what you can expect after joint replacement surgery. However, it's important to remember that everyone's road to recovery will be different.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Every surgery poses risks and complications.

Some risks depend on your current lifestyle and overall health, but others just come with going under the knife. While your doctor can go into more specifics about your potential complications, here is an overview of common complications of joint replacement surgeries.

Blood Clots

Blood clotting is a potential complication following a joint replacement surgery. Blood clots can be dangerous because a clot can travel from your leg to your lungs and cause serious health issues.

Signs of a blood clot include pain, redness, increased swelling, high temperature at the incision site, and shortness of breath.

Infection

The surgery site may become infected. Signs of infection include redness, pain, drainage from the surgical site, or fever. Infection can be treated, so make sure to contact your doctor if signs of infection appear after surgery.

Leg Length Discrepancy

Hip and knee replacement surgeries may result in changes of your leg length. Some patients report that they feel like the operated leg feels longer although their legs are perfectly even. It just takes time to adjust.

But discrepancies in leg length do happen. While doctors do the best they can to match leg lengths, this can be difficult in some cases. If you experience a significant difference in leg length, you may need to wear shoe lifts after surgery.

Limit Range of Motion

Because joint replacement surgeries are so invasive, you will have limited range of motion for some time. Most individuals regain their range of motion and even increase it after surgery. However, some seniors may face difficulties, resulting in a more limited range of motion.

Numbness

After surgery, you may experience numbness. Typically, this feeling goes away as your joint heals. It can take up to a year for numbness to completely subside for some individuals.

Dislocation of Joint

Particularly in hip and shoulder replacement surgeries, joint dislocation may occur; however, the chance is extremely low. Dislocation happens when the new ball slips out of its hip socket. The chances for dislocation are higher during the first few weeks after surgery while the muscle is still recovering and tightening around the new joint.

If your joint does dislocate, your doctor can help put it back into place. You may need to wear a brace to help hold the joint in place if you experience repeated dislocations.

Nerve Irritation

Some patients who undergo joint replacement surgeries experience nerve irritation after surgery. The cause of the irritation is unknown, but it usually subsides as your joint heals. This irritation should not affect your mobility.

Extra Bone Formation

In some cases, individuals develop extra bone around the joint, which may result in pain or stiffness in the joint. This can be removed with another surgery. Some doctors may recommend radiation therapy before surgery to help avoid this formation.

CONCLUSION

Joint replacement surgeries can often provide needed relief to seniors and help them remain healthy, happy, and at home. While the recovery process may not be easy, it is often worth it as seniors can regain some of their independence and improve their quality of life long-term.

For more information on preparing for surgery and getting help during the recovery process, reach out to Caring Senior Service. Our professional caregivers are specially trained to aid seniors who have undergone a joint replacement surgery.

RESOURCES

<https://www.thechristhospital.com/Documents/Our%20Services/Hip%20And%20Knee%20Replacement%20Guide.pdf>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4551172/>



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