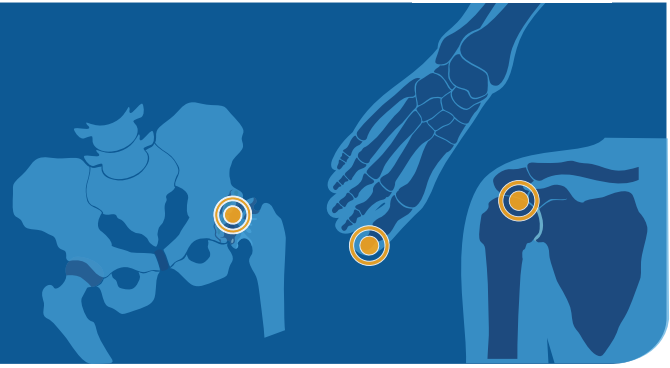


What to Do After Surgery



Your surgery has happened and you're home from the hospital. Now your recovery can begin. Taking care of yourself and your joint after surgery will help ensure that you continue to benefit from the procedure and keep your joint healthy in the long-term. This care and attention starts the moment you return home from the hospital.

Movement and Daily Activity

It's important to return to regular physical activity as soon as possible after your joint replacement, once you've received approval from your healthcare team. You'll be discharged from the hospital with exercises to aid your recovery, so complete them 3 to 5 times every day. You will need to ease back into movement, starting with the exercises provided by your care team. Over time, you will progress to increasing the use of your joint over longer periods of time. Make sure to only engage in activities approved by your care team and don't try to do too much too soon. Keep a log of your daily exercise routine and share this with your care team.

If the surgery was on your hip or knee, you should walk every day and take lots of breaks. Both rest and exercise are very important for your recovery. In the first few weeks after surgery, you will probably get tired quickly. Rest when you feel tired and break up or pace your activities throughout the day.

Continue your prescribed exercises until you begin therapy with a physiotherapist and/or occupational therapist. Your therapist(s) will work with you to create a rehabilitation program that will optimize your recovery and help strengthen your muscles and joint. Additional exercises will also be given to stretch any tight muscles and other tissues, as well as help improve your balance if it was affected by the surgery. You should continue to use mobility aids or assistive devices until your therapist or surgeon advises you to stop.

Once approved by your care team, low-to-moderate intensity activity should be done 4 to 7 days a week. These activities should be low impact, allowing for periods of rest and they should not cause joint pain. Low impact activities include: walking, swimming, light bicycling on flat roads, stationary bicycling, or golfing (except in the case of shoulder surgery, which will require a longer recovery time before returning to activities such as golf). Ask your surgeon when it is safe to resume recreational activities and sports.

If you require assistive devices, continuing using them as recommended by your physiotherapist or occupational therapist. Depending on the joint, you may need to keep canes or walkers on hand for longer walks or for extra support during your recovery.

Pain

After surgery, your doctors and nurses will make every effort to control your pain. Adequate pain control means that you are able to look after yourself and do your usual daily tasks with (near) full independence. In addition to a variety of pain relief medications, there are different techniques to manage pain in order to avoid or minimize the need for strong opioid medications during your recovery.

There are many pain management techniques that can help alleviate your pain after surgery:

- ▼ Reducing swelling can help minimize pain. You can reduce swelling by elevating the affected joint and applying ice, four times a day, for 15-20 minutes at a time.
- ▼ For weight-bearing joints, maintaining a healthy weight will reduce stress on the joint and pain.
- ▼ Maintain your prescribed exercises to help reduce swelling and inflammation. Slight pain is acceptable, but don't push to the point of severe pain. If the exercises are causing severe pain, consult with your health care team.
- ▼ Mindfulness, a thinking activity that focuses your attention and feelings of being present and in the moment, can help reduce anxiety and overcome pain. Mindfulness allows you to put your pain in perspective and draw your attention to other sensations.

Medications

Many types of medicines are available to help control pain and make you feel more comfortable, allowing you to start moving sooner, get your strength back more quickly, and recover from surgery faster.

Medication should be taken as soon as you begin to feel pain, not when it becomes severe. Always follow the instructions on the prescription labels and do not exceed the recommended dose. It is normal to feel some pain after surgery. The goal should be to manage your pain so that you can function well, rather than aim or expect to be completely pain-free as soon as possible.

You may receive one or more types of medications to help with your symptoms including:

- ▼ Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, naproxen or acetylsalicylic acid, reduce swelling and soreness and can be used for mild to moderate pain. NSAIDs can reduce or eliminate your need for opioid medications and do not lead to dependence/addiction. Taken on their own, they may not fully relieve moderate to severe pain that you may experience after surgery.
- ▼ Acetaminophen is a pain-relieving drug (analgesic) that does not have anti-inflammatory properties and works well for mild to moderate pain. Acetaminophen can be taken safely in combination with an NSAID medication, as they work to reduce pain through different mechanisms. Taking both medications together can help more than taking either one on their own and may reduce your need for strong opioid pain medications.
- ▼ Opioids are powerful pain medications used to treat severe pain. These medications have significant side effects and can be addictive. You may only need to use opioids for a brief period of time after surgery, if at all. A combination of other pain medications and pain management techniques should be used first, with strong opioid medication taken only if necessary. To reduce the risk of overdose or abuse, opioid medications are taken in the smallest possible dose for the shortest possible time after surgery.

Every medication can have side effects, and you should talk with your doctor or pharmacist about all your medications to avoid any harmful reactions.

Incision Care

Taking care of your surgical incision is an important part of your recovery. There may be some drainage from the cut within the first week after surgery. If there is any drainage after one week, you should contact your surgeon.

Here are some tips to help you take care of your incision:

- ▼ Look at the cut every day. Check to make sure it is not infected. If it is infected, it might be very red or there could be pus around the cut or a lot of liquid leaking from it. As noted, a small amount of liquid drainage is normal in the first few days after surgery.
- ▼ Keep the cut clean and dry. Do not rub or scratch the cut or the area around it.
- ▼ You can take a shower or sponge bath. Take off the bandage before you bathe. Wash yourself with soap and water. Let water run over the cut. Do not rub or scrub your staples or stitches.
- ▼ When you are clean, pat the cut dry with a clean towel. Do not put any cream, lotion or oil on your cut. Put a new bandage on once the area is totally dry.
- ▼ Do not soak in a bath, pool or hot tub until your staples or stitches have been removed, your cut is completely healed, and there is no scab remaining.

Sources

<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/recovery/>

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This information was reviewed in September 2019 with patient input from a member of the arthritis community and expert advice from:

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