

Following Knee Replacement Surgery

After your knee replacement surgery, you're an important member of the healthcare team that will help you continue to get better. There's a lot you can do to help yourself recover. This handout has information on how to care for yourself by:

- Protecting against infection
- Watching for blood clots
- Caring for your surgery site
- Preventing swelling
- Taking medication
- Following a physical therapy plan
- Protecting your new joint
- Knowing who to call when you need help

Protecting against infection

After surgery, you have a greater chance of getting an infection, but you can take action to avoid this.

Wash your hands a lot, especially before and after you touch your surgery area. Good handwashing is the most important thing you — and those who care for you — can do to prevent infection.

Watch for symptoms that might mean an infection is starting:

- Fever (an oral temperature over 100.5°F)
- More redness or swelling at the area of your surgery, or the area feels hot to the touch
- More drainage from the surgery site or a change in the color of the drainage
- A lot more pain (different from the pain you feel when you increase your activity)



Watching for blood clots

Surgery makes you more likely to develop blood clots. Blood clots can be dangerous and require immediate medical care. When a clot forms in your lower leg, it is called a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Symptoms of a DVT include:

- Pain or tenderness in your calf (the back of your lower leg) that gets worse when you pull your foot forward
- An area on your calf that feels warmer to the touch than the rest of your leg

If you notice these symptoms, **do not massage** your calf. Call your doctor even if it is after hours. **Don't wait.** Your doctor may tell you to go to the Emergency Room right away.

Caring for your surgery site

If your wound is closed with staples: If your doctor asks you, you'll get instructions on how to clean the area and change the dressing. The staples will be removed by your doctor or therapist.

If your wound is closed with Steri-Strips: **Steri-Strips** are special strips of tape sometimes used to help keep the skin closed while it heals. Leave the Steri-Strips on until your provider says you can take them off. It's okay to get Steri-Strips wet when you shower — just gently pat the area dry when you are done.

Showering: Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, you can shower as soon as you can move safely in the bathroom. If you're not steady when standing, get help with your shower so that you don't fall.

Special instructions about the surgery site:

- Do not remove the dressing until your doctor or physical therapist tells you to.
- If the dressing comes off, cover the area with clean gauze.
- _____

Preventing swelling

Swelling around your surgery site will increase your pain and make your joint stiff. To prevent this:

- **Keep your leg elevated** when you sit or lie down.
- Wear your **compression stocking** if your doctor tells you to.
- Use an **ice pack or ice machine** on the front and back of your knee if your surgeon tells you to. Your therapist will tell you how long to keep using ice.

Special instructions to prevent swelling:

- Wear your compression stocking for _____ weeks.
- Apply ice pack for _____ minutes _____ times a day.
- Use ice machine for _____ minutes _____ times a day.

Taking medication

Taking anticoagulant medication: After your surgery, you will need to take an anticoagulant medication to keep your blood from clotting too easily while you are healing.

Special instructions on your anticoagulant(s):

Your doctor has ordered these anticoagulant(s):

- Coumadin (take by mouth at night)
You'll get a handout about Coumadin.

- Lovenox or Arixtra (inject into skin)
Your health care team will teach you how to inject yourself, and you'll get a handout about your medication.

- Other: _____

Taking pain medication: Getting pain relief at home will help you rest better and do your exercises so your knee will heal properly. In the hospital, your pain may have been relieved using a nerve block or medication given in your vein. At home, you will need to take pain medication by mouth. It is important to take your pain medication exactly as your doctor instructs. This will help you get better faster. Also be sure to:

- **Avoid alcohol** while you are on pain medication.
- **Tell your doctor when your pain medication is running low** — you don't want to run out, especially after hours or over the weekend.
- **Take your medications on a schedule** so your pain does not get out of control and you can do your exercises well.
- Your pain medication is: _____

Following a physical therapy plan

Your physical therapist has created an **exercise plan** to strengthen and retrain your muscles as you get used to using your new joint. By doing your exercises just as your therapist instructs, you are more likely to make a full recovery. Here are some tips to follow:

- Consult your therapist if you have concerns about your pain.
- Do each exercise with both legs just as you were taught. You are retraining your muscles — and the movements you make now will affect how well the joint works once you are healed.
- Keep your knee aligned with your hip when you are exercising, walking, or moving between seats.
- Follow the plan the same way every day to maximize your recovery.



Protecting your new joint

Walk correctly

- Your therapist wants you to use:
 - A walker
 - A single crutch
 - Crutches
 - A cane
- Always use your walker, crutches, or cane until your therapist says you don't need them.
- Start with short, frequent walks.
- Take steps that are smooth, even, and rhythmical (not limping).
- Pay attention to your knee. If it swells or hurts more than usual, cut back on walking.
- Be careful and follow your doctor's orders when putting weight on your operated leg.

Special instructions about bearing weight:

- Full weight bearing allowed: _____
- Partial weight bearing allowed: _____
- No weight bearing allowed: _____

Be safe with stairs. If you must go up or down stairs, there are a few things to keep in mind to be safe:

- Go up or down the stairs **one step at a time**.
- **Going up:** Step up first with your non-operated leg, then with your operated leg, then with your crutches. Have someone on the step behind you, if possible.
- **Going down:** Put your crutches down first, then the operated leg, then the non-operated leg. Have someone on the step in front of you, if possible.

Avoid certain positions and movements. Be careful while your knee is healing.

DO NOT:

- Kneel on your replaced knee until your therapist says it's okay.
- Bend your replaced knee quickly and forcefully.
- Sit with your replaced knee bent for longer than 30 minutes at a time.
- Roll your leg to the outside. Keep your leg straight.
- Put a pillow under your knee while you're in bed.
- Drive until your doctor says it's okay.

Knowing who to call when you need help

Call 911 (or the emergency number for your area) if you have an emergency such as severe bleeding, chest pain, or severe shortness of breath.

- **Call your doctor if you notice:**

- Signs of a clot (see page 1)
- Bleeding (for example, bruising or nosebleeds)
- Signs of an infection (see page 1)
- Any new symptom, such as pain, that gets worse or doesn't go away with medication

Your doctor is:

Phone number:

- **Call your physical therapist if you:**

- Have questions about how to do the exercises that can't wait until your next therapy session
- Need to change a visit time

Your physical therapist is:

Phone number:
