Intermountain® Healthcare

Knee Replacement Surgery: *Home Instructions*

Now that you're home after your knee surgery, your homecare team will help you to continue to get better. And there's a lot you need to do to help your knee recover. This handout has information on how to care for yourself by:

- Protecting against infection
- Caring for the surgery site
- Preventing swelling
- Taking medication and following a diet that helps your medication work well
- Following an exercise plan to help you heal
- Protecting the new joint
- Knowing who to contact when you need help

Following these instructions carefully will help you get better faster.

Protecting against infection

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

Good handwashing is the most important thing you — and those who care for you — can do to prevent infection. Wash your hands before you touch the area where your surgery was done.

Call your doctor if you notice symptoms that might mean an infection is starting:

- Fever (an oral temperature over 101°F)
- An increase in redness or swelling at the area of your surgery, or the area feeling hot to the touch
- An increase in amount of drainage from the surgery site, or the drainage changing color
- A lot more pain (different from more pain when you increase your activity)

Breathing deeply will help prevent a respiratory infection following surgery. You started deep breathing exercises in the hospital and you'll want to continue once you are home.

- Take **deep breaths** every hour until you are back to your usual level of activity.
- Do your breathing exercises — use a **spirometer** if you were given one in the hospital.

Caring for your surgery site

Staples: If your doctor closed your wound with staples, you'll get instructions on how to clean the area and change the dressing. Your doctor may want you to leave the dressing on as long as it is clean and dry or may want you to change the dressing. The staples will be removed by your doctor or therapist.

Showering: Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, you can shower once you are home and can safely move in the bathroom. If you're not steady, get help with your shower so you don't fall.

Steri-Strips: On your surgery site you may see special strips of tape called **steri-strips**. Steri-strips help keep the skin closed while it heals. Leave the steri-strips on until your healthcare provider tells you it's okay to remove them. It's okay to get the steri-strips wet in your shower — just gently pat the area dry when you are done.

Special instructions about the surgery site:

☐ Cover 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 are sitting.
- Wear your **compression stocking** for the number of weeks your doctor has prescribed (see below). Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, you may leave it off for an hour or so each day.
- Use an **ice pack** on the front and back of your knee. Your doctor or therapist will tell you how long to keep using ice packs.

Special instructions to prevent swelling:

☐ Wear your compression stocking _____ weeks.

☐ Apply ice pack _____.

☐ Use ice machine _____.

Taking anticoagulant medication

Following your surgery, your doctor wants you to take an **anticoagulant** medication to keep your blood from clotting too easily while you are healing.

Special instructions:

Your doctor has ordered the following anticoagulant(s):

☐ Coumadin by mouth

Your Coumadin dose is _____.

The tablet strength is _____ mg.

Please take your dose at night.

☐ Lovenox or Arixtra (injection in the skin)

☐ _____

About Coumadin (warfarin)

Take Coumadin exactly as your doctor instructs. It's important to have just the right level in your blood. If the Coumadin blood level gets too high, you might bleed too easily. If it gets too low, your blood might form a clot in your veins.

Blood testing: Your doctor will regularly order a blood test to monitor your Coumadin levels. This blood test is called a **PT/INR** and it measures the ability of your blood to clot. The test may use blood from a finger stick or regular blood draw.

PT/INR goal: Your doctor wants your PT/INR level to be _____. Your homecare therapist can use this log to keep track of your test results and dosage changes:

Date	PT/INR Result	Dose

Eating plan: Since there are many foods that affect Coumadin, you may need to make some changes to your diet. See "Foods Affecting Coumadin" on the next page for more details.

About Lovenox (enoxaparin) or Arixtra (fondaparinux sodium)

If your doctor wants you to take either Lovenox or Arixtra, you will inject the medication under your skin.

You'll get a separate handout about the medication and will be taught how to give the injection.

Foods affecting Coumadin

It's important to keep the level of Coumadin in your blood consistent. To help do this, follow these guidelines related to foods and drinks that affect your Coumadin levels.

- **Be consistent with Vitamin K.** The Coumadin levels in your blood rise and fall when you change the amount of foods you eat that are high in Vitamin K. This makes it hard to keep the medicine at the right level. **Each day you should eat a consistent amount of foods with Vitamin K** so your blood level of Coumadin stays in the correct range. Here are some foods that are rich in Vitamin K:
  - Most green, leafy vegetables, dark green lettuce
  - Soybean and canola oils
  - Avocado, asparagus
  - Broccoli, cauliflower
  - Brussels sprouts
  - Cabbage
  - Cucumber (unpeeled)
  - Green peas, beans

- **Avoid or limit alcohol.** Drinking can affect your PT/INR level, making it difficult to manage your Coumadin dose. If you drink and don't want to quit, be consistently moderate in your alcohol intake.
- **Limit cranberry juice.** Drink no more than ½ cup per day, since more than that will affect your blood level of Coumadin.
- **Check with your doctor before taking or using teas, herbs, or supplements.** The following are known to interact with Coumadin:
  - Green tea, black tea, tea leaves
  - Seaweed
  - Alfalfa

Taking pain medication

Getting pain relief will help you rest better and do important exercises so your new joint will heal properly. For the surgery, you may have received a nerve block to relieve pain while you were in the hospital. In the hospital, you may have also received pain medication in your vein.

Now that you're home, it's important to **take your pain medication exactly as your doctor instructs.** This will help you get better faster and avoid complications. Also follow these tips:

- Don't drink 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.

☐ **Your pain medication is:**

_____

Using a CPM machine

Your doctor may want you to use a **Continuous Passive Motion (CPM) machine** to keep your knee moving when you are in bed. Your doctor or physical therapist will let you know how long to use the CPM each day. You'll also find out how often to increase the settings and how many degrees to increase the settings each time. Be sure to follow your instructions for using the CPM.

Special instructions about using a CPM:

☐ Your doctor ordered a CPM for you.

Use it _____ hours per day.

CPM Settings:

Increase by _____ degrees every _____.

Here are some other guidelines to follow:

- If you experience more pain after changing the settings, return to the previous setting and speak with your physical therapist.
- Continue to use the CPM for three weeks or longer if instructed by your doctor.

Following a physical therapy plan

Your 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 while doing exercises or other activity:

- Stop exercising when you feel excessive pain.
- Be careful to do each exercise with both legs just the way you were taught. You are retraining your muscles — and the movements you learn 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 using the CPM.

Protecting your new joint

Avoid certain positions and movements while your new joint is healing. Use care:

- **Not** to kneel on your operated knee
- **Not** to bend your knee forcefully
- **Not** to cross your legs
- **Not** to twist toward the side of your surgery
- **Not** to put a pillow under your knee while you're in bed

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

- Avoid stairs if you are unsteady or dizzy.
- Climb the stairs one at a time.
- Do not switch feet for each new stair.
- Use crutches if instructed by your therapist. Your therapist will have you practice stair climbing, if needed.

Be careful with bearing weight. Your doctor may want you to limit the amount of weight you place on your affected leg. If you have a walker or a cane, use it as instructed by your therapist.

Special instructions about bearing weight:

☐ Full weight bearing allowed

☐ Partial weight bearing: _____

☐ Non-weight bearing: _____

Getting help

When to call your doctor: Your doctor needs to know if you notice certain signs that might mean there is a problem starting.

- A **deep vein thrombosis (DVT)** is a clot forming in your lower leg. If you notice symptoms of a DVT, do not massage the calf of your leg. Call your doctor even if it is after hours, so you can be examined and treated if needed — it may be necessary to go to the Emergency Room. Symptoms include:
  - Pain or tenderness in the calf of your lower leg that gets worse when you pull your foot forward
  - Increased skin temperature over your calf
- Also tell your doctor if you notice:
  - Bleeding (for example, bruising or nosebleeds)
  - Signs of an infection, such as fever, more redness or swelling, skin that feels hot, more drainage, drainage that changes color, or more pain
  - Any new symptom, such as pain that gets worse or doesn't go away with medication

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

When to call your physical therapist: If you have questions about how to do the exercises that can't wait until your next therapy session, or if you need to change a visit time, call your physical therapist.

Your Physical Therapist is:

_____

Phone Number: _____

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