

Total Knee Arthroplasty

What is total knee arthroplasty?

Total knee arthroplasty [AHR-thruh-plas-tee] is a surgery used to perform a total knee replacement. In total knee replacement surgery, diseased and worn out cartilage (smooth lining of the bone ends) is removed and replaced with metal and plastic parts. This restores the smooth surfaces of the joint and allows your knee to move without pain.

Why do I need it?

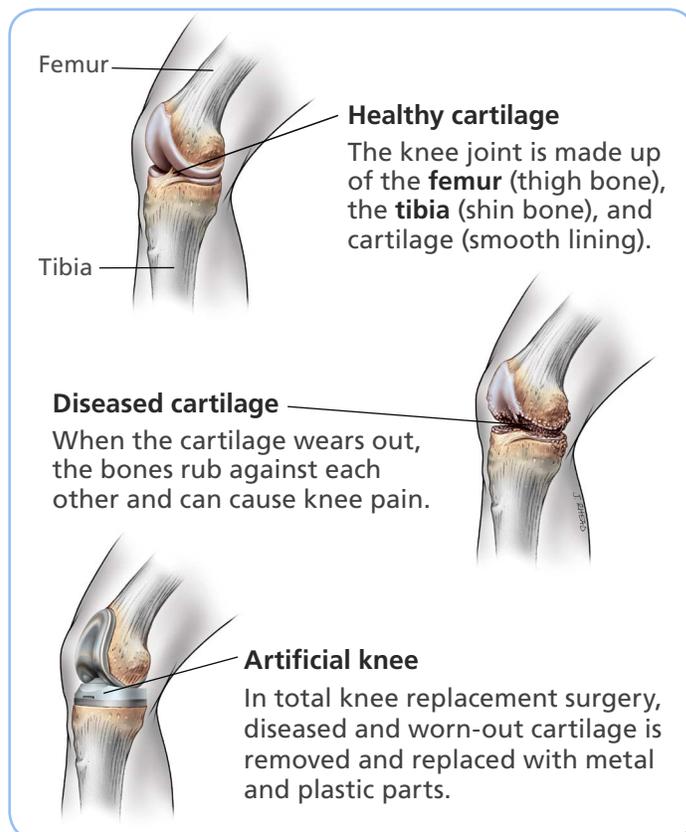
Total knee replacements are usually performed in people with painful arthritis that limits their ability to move around. Most patients are over 55 years old, but the operation may be considered for younger people as well. Your doctor may recommend total knee replacement if:

- You have pain or stiffness in your knee
- Your knee is so painful that you have trouble with daily activities such as climbing stairs, dressing, bathing, or preparing meals
- Your knee is unstable and “gives out”
- You have a knee or leg deformity
- You have tried medications, weight loss, or injections that have not been helpful

The goal of knee replacement is to relieve pain and improve the function of your knee.

Where can I learn more?

Ask your nurse if you would like to have other patient education materials or visit intermountainhealthcare.org.



What can I expect?

A total knee replacement is a very painful procedure. However, this pain will decrease steadily over time, and your ability to perform the tasks of daily living will increase. The procedure should help relieve the knee pain you had beforehand and increase your ability to bend your knee.

With new materials and techniques, most replacement knees last about 15 years. In a few cases, new knee parts can loosen over time and need to be repaired. There's no way to predict how long your knee replacement will last, but your new knee will last longest if you:

- Stay moderately active and don't overdo it
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Keep in touch with your doctor and physical therapist

What happens before the surgery?

Plan ahead

Plan ahead for life after surgery by doing these things:

- Find a partner in healing.** A partner in healing is a friend or relative who will help you at home and in the hospital before and after surgery.
- Stock up on supplies.** To avoid having to run errands while you're recovering, make sure you have supplies on hand before your surgery.
- Prepare your home.** While you're recovering, you'll need to be careful about reaching and falling. Look for places in your home that could cause problems. Have someone help make your home safer.

Things to do

Below are things you can do that will help both you and your healthcare providers prepare for your surgery:

- Attend a pre-surgery class.** Ask your surgeon if there is a pre-surgery class you can attend. These classes give you and your partner in healing additional instructions about your surgery, your hospital stay and discharge, and your recovery.
- Discuss current health conditions with your healthcare providers.** The better your healthcare providers understand your current condition, the better they can reduce the risk of complications.
- You must stop taking some medications a week or more before surgery to prevent excessive bleeding.** Discuss all your medications, both prescribed and over-the-counter, with your surgeon. Your surgeon will tell you which medications to stop, and when to stop them.
- Have a physical exam and pre-admission tests.**
- Have a pre-admission nursing interview.**
- Prevent constipation.**

What happens after the surgery?

Your hospital stay

Most people stay in the hospital about 1 to 4 days after surgery. During this time, you and your healthcare providers will work together to help you recover well and build the strength you need to leave the hospital.

- **Pain management.** You can expect to have some pain after your surgery. Managing your pain well is a very important part of your treatment. The goal of pain management is to reduce your pain enough so that you can do the physical therapy exercises that help rebuild your strength and range of motion. Your pain will lessen over time. You may receive pain medication as pain pills, from a nerve block, or through an IV. Be sure to let your healthcare team know as soon as you start to feel pain so they can help you manage it.
- **Incision care.** Your incision will be closed with staples or sutures (stitches) and wrapped in a dressing. You may have an ice pack put over it to reduce swelling. You may also have a drain to remove fluids from your incision.
- **Physical therapy and activity.** A physical therapist will help you learn a series of recovery exercises. You will be taught to use crutches or a walker. The goal of physical therapy is to help your knee become functional and to improve its range of motion.

Recovery

You'll learn how to care for yourself as you recover. Your nurse will go over instructions and answer any questions you have. Ask your healthcare provider for a copy of the Intermountain Healthcare fact sheet [*Following Knee Replacement Surgery*](#) to take with you when you leave.



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