

# Recovering from knee replacement surgery at home

Over [70,000](#) knee replacement surgeries take place in the UK every year and that number is likely to rise with our ageing population.

So how do you recover from [knee replacement surgery](#)? The time it takes to recover will depend on whether you have had partial knee replacement surgery or total knee replacement surgery. However, in both instances, tips and advice can help you on the road to recovery.

To set yourself up for a good recovery, you need to start taking action before your surgery. Keeping mobile before your new knee joint is fitted will help strengthen your muscles, which is key to the healing process. Let's go through some useful ways to help aid a faster recovery.

## What to expect after knee replacement surgery

You should expect to be up and about 12–24 hours after surgery and can leave the hospital after 2–5 days to begin your recovery at home. You will need a walking aid such as crutches or a walking frame for about one week. After this, it is likely you will be able to walk unaided. You will experience some difficulty walking up and down stairs as this puts the most strain on your joints, but this will ease in time.

In general, people find hip replacement surgery easier to recover from than knee replacement surgery. The hip uses a ball and socket joint and this does not get as stiff after surgery as the knee joint, which works more like a hinge. This means that the knee joint will need more therapy after surgery to regain full range of motion.

As with other major surgeries, you will experience tiredness, so ensure that you factor rest periods into your day. For example, one hour of rest, twice a day.

You may experience stiffness after you have been sitting inactive for long periods of time, with pain on the inside of the knee and partial numbness outside. Both are common during the healing process and will go in time, especially if you are keeping up with your [physiotherapy](#) regime. However, if they persist, or you have concerns, do contact your healthcare team. You may well experience general pain for several weeks if you have had total knee replacement surgery. The swelling usually lasts 2–3 weeks, but can last three months or more.

Choose which chair to sit on carefully and avoid stools and low chairs. When getting up, slide your bottom towards the front edge of the chair, and use the chair arms and your walker/crutches to help support you as you stand.

## How soon can I get back to normal after knee replacement surgery?

You should be able to walk around fairly soon after your surgery. Take your time and don't try to walk too quickly. It is important to listen to your body and if it is telling you to rest, then rest.

To help your body recover, make sure you stay hydrated and drink plenty of water. You can also talk to your healthcare team about healthy eating to aid your recovery.

As long as your knee can bend, you may be able to drive 6–8 weeks after surgery.

After six weeks, you should be able to resume normal leisure activities. However, it may take up to three months for the pain and swelling to settle.

It can take up to two years after your surgery for your knee to fully recover. During this time, your muscles will get stronger from regular exercise and your scar tissue will heal.

## Preparing your home

It's important to plan ahead by preparing your home for your recovery from knee replacement surgery. You may want to consider the following points to help you:

- Avoid trips and falls by moving cables, rugs and furniture, giving you clear paths to walk
- Buy a seat for your shower, as this will limit the chances of a slippery fall
- Consider buying a handy grabber in case you drop something on the floor
- Ensure that your chair is high enough and firm enough, so your knees are lower than your hips when seated
- Ensure you have assistance after surgery and emergency contact numbers are in easy reach
- Have comfortable clothes that are easy to put on and take off
- Stock your fridge with healthy, easy-to-make meals so you don't have to stand for long periods of time cooking

## How to look after your new knee

To aid recovery it is important to follow the instructions of your healthcare team. Taking your prescribed medication at the correct intervals is important.

The first 6–8 weeks can be a challenging but crucial time. The goal is to achieve range of motion to help get you back to normal life. Not practising your physiotherapy exercises consistently can limit the function of your new knee joint.

To help with pain and swelling, a bag of frozen vegetables is a handy aid, as they can mould around the joint. Place a piece of cotton under the bag for comfort and keep the bag in place for a maximum of 10 minutes. Once you have finished, simply place the bag of vegetables back in the freezer until next time you need them.

Try not to sit in the same position in your chair for more than 45 minutes. When you are sitting, keep your feet and knees pointing straight ahead, rather than turning them outwards. Your knees can be either bent or straight depending on what your physiotherapist has advised.

## Things to avoid after knee replacement surgery

- Don't allow your knee to sit higher than your hip
- Don't bend at the waist beyond 90°
- Don't cross your legs for 6–8 weeks
- Don't lean forward while seated, especially to pick something off the floor
- Don't place a pillow under your legs at night as this can result in a permanent bend in your knee.
- Don't twist at the knee or hips

## What exercises can I do after knee replacement surgery?

After surgery, there are some physical activities that are ideal for strengthening your knee and helping you stay in shape. Ask your doctor if these exercises are appropriate and when you can start doing them and for how long.

### Walking

Walking is the ideal way to build up the strength in your knee. When you begin to walk, use smaller steps and go for a short distance so you don't

tire your knee. You will be able to gradually increase the distance without causing any discomfort.

## Swimming

Swimming is the perfect activity as it is not load-bearing and so will not cause your knee any discomfort. Just swim for a modest distance at first; this can be steadily increased.

## Cycling

Inside or outdoors, you will find cycling is an effective way to strengthen your knee as it is not a load-bearing activity. You may want to begin with an exercise bike first before you take to the outdoors. When you're ready to cycle outside, ensure it's on flat ground, avoiding any jolts. You can slowly increase the length of time and distance.

## Activities to avoid after surgery

All high impact sports like basketball, baseball, football and hockey can cause damage to your new knee. Not only are sudden, jerky movements likely to impact your knee area, but the actions of other players can also be unpredictable. It's best to be an enthusiastic supporter.

Other high impact sports to add to the list include running, gymnastics, rock climbing, hang gliding and parachuting.

## Physiotherapy

Your physiotherapist will be on hand after surgery and will design a unique exercise regime to meet your needs. They will take you through the exercises until you are comfortable to do them on your own. As already discussed, physiotherapy is a crucial part of your recovery so make sure you are regularly completing your exercises.

The normal range of motion after knee replacement surgery is medically defined as the ability to get the knee within 5° of a straight knee and being able to bend the knee back to the 90° position. Having said that, most knee replacements have a range of motion from 0° (perfectly straight) to 110° or more.

It is important that you take care of yourself after surgery and allow your body time to heal. Make sure you're not overdoing it and carrying heavy loads. Listen to the advice of your healthcare team as this will aid your recovery.

Once on the road to recovery, you can look forward to and enjoy your new-found mobility, but if you have any concerns about your recovery contact your healthcare team for assistance.