

JOINT REPLACEMENT

Joint replacement is one of the most important advances in orthopaedic surgery since the 1960's. Surgical replacement of the hip or knee (arthroplasty) is a common procedure used when the involved joint has become so painful or degenerated that it is no longer functional. The procedure involves surgical removal of the arthritic areas and replacing these areas with a combination of metal and plastic. Traditionally, joint replacement components are made out of cobalt chrome or titanium alloy, and the plastic is a highly-dense polyethylene. Today, newer bearing technologies, including metals and ceramics, are available. Patients make the decision to have their joint replaced based on the amount of pain they are having and/or the decrease in function they are experiencing.

Normal activities are typically resumed about two months following the surgery, but this is highly dependent on the individual. Most patients are able to drive a car about four weeks following their surgery. You will use a walker or crutches for two to three weeks following surgery, after which you will use a cane for as long as needed, usually another week or two. It is usually four to six weeks before patients are safe with independent ambulation. Travel is generally acceptable after six weeks. Hip precautions are to be followed for the first six weeks after surgery. Often patients are back doing things they couldn't do before surgery such as walking for exercise, golfing, etc. by eight to ten weeks.

Activities that are not allowed following hip and knee replacement surgery include: High level sports activities such as running, high impact aerobics, or anything that involves jumping or jarring motions. Most other activities are permitted, including walking, golfing and swimming. With newer bearing technologies in hip replacement, more active sports such as tennis and racquetball are permissible. Check with your orthopaedic surgeon if you have specific questions regarding permissible activities.

It is common for patients to experience soft tissue discomfort and swelling following hip or knee replacement. In a few patients this may last six to nine months. This gradually diminishes with time and often doesn't restrict your activities. Most people are able to walk without a limp, and typically the swelling resolves after a few months.

Having a joint replacement is a major decision and the patient who is well-informed will likely have the most successful outcome. For this reason, you will be invited to visit the preop education program at the hospital where you will have your surgery. You will have the opportunity to view the facility, which is dedicated to joint replacement surgery, and meet with the Joint Replacement Coordinator for an educational session regarding your upcoming surgery. You will review a video, which describes the total joint replacement process. You will need a thorough history and physical exam by our preoperative clearance clinic, and in some cases specialized stress testing to ensure your fitness to undergo joint replacement, and to prevent medical complications after surgery. Please ask questions if you are unsure of anything.



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