

# Going Home After Total Knee Replacement

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Here are some common questions patients ask as they get ready to go home after a total knee replacement. If you have any questions after reading this, please talk with your nurse or surgeon.

## What should I do for the ride home?

- We suggest you sit in the front seat of the car with the safety belt fastened.
- If you must travel a long distance, plan on stopping each hour to take a short walk and stretch your legs. You may also want to take a dose of pain medicine before you leave the hospital.

## When can I take a shower and get my wound wet?

- Ask your surgeon when you may take a shower.
- Do not put any lotion or ointment on the wound until you have seen your surgeon.
- Do not take a bath in the tub, swim or use a hot tub until your surgeon says you can.
- If you have questions about getting in or out of your tub or shower talk with your home physical therapist.

## What can I do about swelling?

Some leg swelling is normal after surgery. The amount varies from patient to patient. It may last for many months. The swelling may decrease if you:

- Keep your leg elevated with your knee straight when you are sitting.
- Wear TED (support) hose during the day. You may remove the TED hose at night.
- Do not sit for long periods of time. You should not sit for more than an hour and a half at a time.

- Do your ankle pumps every half hour when seated in a chair.

## **How much pain will I have when I leave the hospital?**

Your knee pain should lessen over the next several weeks. It is normal to need pain medicine for a while after surgery. Many patients find they have an increase in pain and swelling when they “overdo it” with their activities. Rest, the use of pain medicine and ice should help get you back on your feet. Note: Many pain medicines can cause constipation.

## **What are the signs of a possible knee infection?**

Signs of infection include any of these:

- Extreme pain and swelling that is not relieved with rest/elevation.
- Any drainage from your wound after 7 days after surgery.
- Fever and chills.

**Call your surgeon’s office if you have any concerns about infection.**

**Any infection in your body should be treated right away!** If it is not treated, it could spread through your bloodstream to your new knee. A few infections to watch for include urinary tract infections, strep throat and wound infections. Call your surgeon if you think you have an infection.

## **What else do I need to know about infections?**

Please check with your surgeon’s office to find out if you will need antibiotics for the following procedures:

- Dental work, dental cleaning and exams
- Cystoscopy and Colonoscopy

Before any dental work or medical procedures, tell the doctor or dentist who is caring for you that you have a total knee replacement. They can prescribe antibiotics for you or call your surgeon’s office if they have any questions.

## **How can I help prevent blood clots?**

- You have been given medicine to help prevent blood clots. Take this medicine as prescribed. Your surgeon will tell you how long you need to take this medicine.

- You should wear your support stockings for 6 weeks and do the exercises your surgeon ordered.

## **What are signs of a blood clot?**

You should be concerned if you have pain, swelling, redness or warmth in your leg that does not go away. These may be signs of a blood clot in your leg. Call your surgeon's office if you have any of these problems or any other concerns about blood clots.

**Call 911 right away if you suddenly have chest pain or trouble breathing.** These may be signs of a blood clot in your lungs.

## **How long do I have to use my crutches or walker?**

You should use your walker or crutches based on your surgeon's orders until your first follow-up visit with your surgeon.

## **How often should I do my exercises?**

Your physical therapist has shown you many exercises to do for your knee and should also give you a handout about these exercises before you go home. Do these at least 2 times a day.

Be sure to take your pain medicine 30 to 45 minutes before you exercise. **Apply ice to your knee for 15 to 20 minutes after.**

## **When can I drive/travel?**

- We suggest that you start with short trips to places you know.
- You might be more comfortable if you move the car seat back and/or recline it to give you more leg room.

## **When can I resume sexual activity?**

You may resume sexual activity when you are comfortable. Call your surgeon or nurse if you have questions.

## **When do I see my surgeon again?**

You should have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon in 2 to 6 weeks. Call your surgeon's office to confirm date and time of appointment.

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This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your health care provider's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.