



Frequently Asked Questions Total Knee Replacement

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What is arthritis?

A layer of cartilage covers the bones in your joints. Cartilage is a tough lubricating tissue that provided smooth, pain-free motion to the joints. Arthritis causes the cartilage to wear away, eventually resulting in painful bone on bone contact.

Why does my knee hurt?

As the layer of cartilage wears away, the bones begin to rub against bone, which causes the discomfort and stiffness commonly associated with arthritis.

What is Total Knee Replacement?

This involves surgical removal of the arthritic joint surface. Basically a resurfacing procedure which replaces damaged cartilage with metal and plastic, cementing these components to the bone. This will eliminate the joint pain being caused by the arthritis.

How long does a knee replacement last?

All implants have a limited life expectancy depending on the patient's age, weight, activity level and medical conditions. On average most Total Knee Replacements last 15-20 years, but can last longer.

Why do they fail?

They fail primarily because the implant loosens from the bone or because the plastic (polyethylene) liner wears out. Old components that have failed can be replaced with new ones.

What are the risks and complications of the surgery?

Infection (less than 1%), blood clots, damage to nerves or arteries, stiffness, implant failures, or death. To help avoid these complications, surgeons routinely prescribe antibiotics and blood thinners during and after surgery.

When should I have surgery?

Based upon your history, x-rays and physical exam, the surgeon can make some general recommendations. However, you will know when the time is right for you. You will need to decide when your discomfort, stiffness and disability justify undergoing surgery. There is no harm in waiting to have surgery if conservative, non-operative methods can adequately control your discomfort.

How long does it take to recover?

Initially, it takes approximately 6 weeks for the soft tissue, muscles and ligaments to heal. You will begin walking with support (walker or crutches) the day of or after surgery. Most patients are able to negotiate stairs within 3 days and will be discharged to go home. You may continue to use support up to 6 weeks and do your home strengthening program. You may ride in a car but not be able to drive a car for 4-6 weeks. Returning to work depends on the type of work you do. Office workers may return as early as 3 weeks.

Will I need blood?

Probably not, approximately 2% of patients require blood transfusions after surgery.

Will I need a private nurse at home?

No, most patients have family members who can assist them with daily care for about 2 weeks.

Will I need special equipment?

Not in general, but a glider, rocking chair or exercise bike can be very helpful when you get home for working on your range of motion (knee bend). We would not start the exercise bike until you are 2 weeks post op and do not use any tension.

Will I need Physical Therapy at home?

Not usually, a physical therapist will work with you during your hospitalization. They will teach you what you will need to know and you will continue this at home. If you need extra guidance please ask about out-patient physical therapy.

How long until I can drive a car?

The ability to drive depends on whether the surgery was performed on the right leg or the left leg and the type of car you have. If your left leg is your surgical leg and you have an automatic transmission, you could be driving within 2 weeks. If your right leg is the surgical leg, driving may be restricted for as long as 6 weeks.

When will I be able to go back to work?

We recommend that most people take a month off work. Patients with more sedentary jobs may be able to return sooner. Patients with more strenuous jobs may require 2-3 months before returning to working.

What are my activity restrictions after a Total Knee Replacement?

You may engage in low impact activities such as dancing, golf, walking, swimming, hiking, biking and horseback riding. You must avoid running, jumping and high impact sports.