



# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT JOINT REPLACEMENT SURGERY

**Joint replacement surgeries, most often involving knees and hips, have become increasingly common, with more than one million performed in the United States each year.**

Usually, a joint is replaced because it has been damaged by arthritis or an injury and is the cause of significant pain. Some or all of the damaged joint is removed during surgery and replaced with a prosthesis. A prosthesis is a metal, ceramic, or plastic device designed to replicate the movement of a healthy, normally functioning joint.

While knee and hip replacements are most common, surgery can be performed on other joints, including the elbow, ankle, wrist, and shoulder.

## **Knowing if You Need a Joint Replacement**

Joint replacement surgery is not for everyone, as there are less drastic treatments such as physical therapy, weight loss, and medication to try first.

If you've tried and found nonsurgical treatments are not working, and your damaged joint makes it difficult for you to accomplish daily tasks, sleep, or participate in activities you enjoy, then you may want to talk to your doctor about joint replacement.

Your primary care provider will assess your symptoms and recommend a consultation with an orthopedic surgeon or rheumatologist to determine whether you are a candidate for surgery. X-rays, CT scans, or an MRI may be used to document the severity of joint damage and plan a course of treatment.

Patients usually considered eligible for joint replacement surgery are in good health other than the joint problem and experience high levels of chronic pain caused by osteoarthritis. The Rothman Orthopaedic Institute, a leading orthopedic practice based in Philadelphia, recommends a five-question self-test to determine whether joint replacement may be a good option:

- Can I live with the pain I am currently experiencing?
- Have my symptoms (mainly pain) worsened over the past year?
- Am I healthy enough for surgery?
- Am I prepared to undertake the recovery process?
- Will my insurance cover the procedure and costs associated with rehab?

If you are considering joint replacement, consider how you answered those questions. Discuss your situation with your doctor and family members.

## Preparing for Joint Replacement Surgery

There are steps you can take to prepare for joint replacement surgery in order to have a successful outcome, and ConnectCare3's Nurse Navigators are here to support you along the way. Your Nurse Navigator will help to identify well-qualified surgeons with a specific background in joint replacements and provide you with additional tools and resources so you are able to make well-informed decisions about your procedure.

You should receive detailed instructions from the medical group that will perform your surgery. Be sure to read the instructions carefully and contact your doctor right away if there is something that you do not understand.

In some cases, physical therapy is recommended before surgery to help strengthen muscles around the joint. If you take certain medications, you may be advised to stop them several days before surgery.

You will be advised not to eat or drink anything for a certain number of hours before surgery. You may be instructed to disinfect your skin with special cloths or soap provided by your surgeon.

## What to Expect Before and After Surgery

The day of surgery, you can expect your medical team to prepare you for your joint replacement surgery and discuss anesthesia. You will receive anesthesia, a sedative, and an intravenous antibiotic to reduce the chance of infection.

After your surgery, you can expect assistance with standing or walking. You will receive physical therapy in the hospital to aid you in completing day-to-day tasks. In conjunction with minimal physical therapy, you will receive instructions for exercises to perform at home and physical therapy recommendations.

## Readying Your Home for Recovery

You can make your home as safe as possible during your recovery period by taking steps before your surgery. The Mayo Clinic recommends the following actions to create a secure environment as you recover for lower extremity replacements:

- Create a living space on one floor since climbing stairs can be difficult
- Install safety bars or a secure handrail in your shower or bath
- Secure stairway handrails
- Get a chair with a firm seat cushion and back that allows you to elevate your leg
- Arrange for a toilet-seat riser with arms if you have a low toilet
- Get a stable bench or chair for your shower
- Remove loose rugs and cords

The National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine. "Total Hip Arthroplasty – over 100 years of operative history"

Accessed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3257425/>

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The Rothman Orthopaedic Institute. "Joint Series – Blog 3: Do I Need a Joint Replacement?"

Accessed at <https://rothmanortho.com/stories/blog/do-i-need-a-joint-replacement>

The Mayo Clinic. "Knee Replacement"

Accessed at [www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/knee-replacement/about/pac-20385276](http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/knee-replacement/about/pac-20385276)



## Recovering After Surgery

You will be advised to continue exercising on your own or participating in physical therapy after returning home. You should be able to resume most daily activities within three to six weeks, assuming no complications. Your doctor will advise you about driving, but you should not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medications.

## Caring for Your Joints

Of course, caring for your joints in the first place can help reduce the possibility that you'll require joint replacement surgery. To do so, experts recommend getting plenty of exercise and eating a diet rich in calcium, Vitamins D and C, and protein.

You should protect your joints during activity, build muscles to support your joints, exercise for a strong core, and keep your weight at a healthy level. Avoid activities that over-stress your joints, and practice good posture, which helps to protect your joints.

## How ConnectCare3 Help

If your physician advises you that you should receive joint replacement surgery, reach out to ConnectCare3. Our Nurse Navigators can research and provide you with options for credentialed surgeons. Our Nurse Navigators can also prepare a list of questions for you to have when going to appointments and provide you education and support during your treatment journey.