

## Common post-op questions and answers

The following are answers to some of the common questions you might have after your joint replacement surgery. These are for guidance only and you should always follow your own surgeon's recovery instructions and contact them if you have any questions or concerns.

### When can I drive?

The most important thing about driving is that you feel comfortable behind the wheel and operating the pedals. You also need to make sure that none of your medications are affecting your ability to think clearly or react appropriately. This means you should be off all narcotic pain medications.

It is advisable to go to a nice open space without traffic, with another person, to make sure that you feel comfortable before resuming normal driving situations. Like everything else in your recovery, it's important to start out gradually. In this case, drive for short trips and gradually go longer distances as you feel comfortable.

If you drive an automatic transmission, and your surgery was on your left side, you can see how comfortable you feel driving once you are off pain medications and feel comfortable in the driver's seat. If your surgery was on your right leg, then you need to wait anywhere from 2-6 weeks depending on the type of surgery you had. Talk with your surgeon about specific driving recommendations they have based on your surgery.

## When can I shower?

After surgery, it's important to not submerge or soak your incision in water. Depending on the type of surgery you had, and the type of bandage that's used, you should be able to shower within a few days of surgery. You may have a waterproof bandage that's applied after surgery, which will protect your incision. In other cases, you may remove your bandage for the shower, taking care not to place the incision directly into the stream of water. Then, pat the area dry and re-apply a dressing or bandage as needed. Please discuss this topic with your surgeon. He or she can guide you based on your individual needs.

You will need to wait until your incision is fully healed before you do things like take a bath or get into a pool or a hot tub. Depending on the type of surgery you had, and how your body heals, this may be anywhere from 3 to 6 weeks.



## How long will I have to use crutches/cane/walker?

Any device to assist with ambulation is meant to be used as a tool. The main reason to use these types of devices is to support your recovery and help you move as normally as possible without limping. The length of time that you'll need to use an assistive device varies based on your surgery, your individual recovery rate, and even your surgeon... but you can expect to use it for approximately 1 to 6 weeks.

## Can I put full weight on my leg and will I have any precautions or restrictions?

This will be dependent on the type of surgery that you had. Many joint replacement surgeries will allow you to be full weight-bearing immediately, but there may be situations when that's not the case. Many repair surgeries may have a period of limited weight-bearing to allow for early healing of those repaired tissues. Depending on the type of surgery you had, your surgeon may recommend some precautions or restrictions in terms of your range of motion. These are typically used early on to protect your healing and to protect from potential complications.



## Will I have to do physiotherapy?

Most orthopedic surgeons will recommend some **physiotherapy**. **Physiotherapy** is very helpful to accomplish many goals following surgery. These may include improving range of motion, increasing strength, improving balance and coordination, and helping you to walk normally again. This may be done in your home, in an outpatient **physiotherapy** clinic, or both. The length of time that you spend in **physiotherapy** will be dictated by the type of surgery you have, how your recovery progresses, and your goals for your desired outcome once you are healed. You can expect to be in **physiotherapy** for anywhere from 3 weeks to 3 months. Your surgeon will be able to tell you more about **physiotherapy** before your surgery and as you recover.

## How long will I be on pain meds/how much pain will I have?

In an effort to avoid over-prescription of opioid pain medications, the medical community has made many advances in pain control by using what we refer to as multi-modal pain control. This means that you may be given several types of medications that all treat different pain in different ways. These may include medications like acetaminophen, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID), a medication to treat nerve pain, and possibly a medication to treat muscle spasms to go along with an opioid for pain control. Your surgeon may also use things like long acting injections or indwelling catheters that provide pain relief and numbing agents. You may be given a brace, compression device, or an ice machine to assist in your recovery.

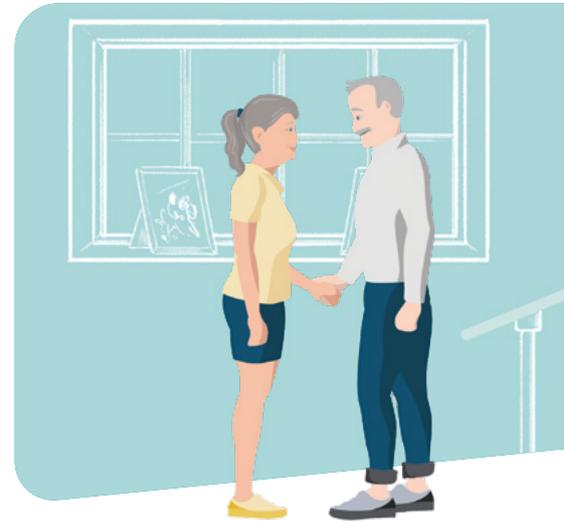
Talk to your surgeon about responsible use and prescriptions of opioids for pain control prior to treatment. Most patients will not need opioids for more than 1 or 2 weeks. Many patients find they only need them for a couple days and some not at all. If an opioid has been prescribed to you prior to surgery, trying to stop or cut back on your use of it prior to surgery will help with pain control post-operatively.



## When will I be able to have sexual intercourse after surgery?

We understand that sexual intercourse is part of your healthy adult life. For those of you able to have sexual intercourse prior to surgery, the emphasis is on making sure that you don't do anything that could cause a problem while you are healing. This will likely mean that you should wait at least 4 to 6 weeks. It's also important to understand that, like all things in your recovery, you should not do things that cause you pain, or move your body into a position that is not advised by your surgeon.

Some of you are currently unable to engage in sexual activity due to your condition. Having surgery may improve your ability to have sexual intercourse with less, or no, pain but some people may find that they are still unable following surgery. Talk to your doctor about any suggestions he or she has for helping through this situation.



## When will I be completely recovered?

Full healing from most orthopedic surgeries will take 6 to 12 months. That being said, most people will feel better than they did before surgery within the first few days or weeks. Recovery will continue during that time and you will feel more and more normal with more activities as you continue to heal. Aside from any complications, many people will feel “normal” with most of their activities by 3 months and feel very few limitations. For some people, it may take the full healing time to feel like you are more like yourself.

### References

Written by Dr. Brian Lewis who received remuneration as a Zimmer Biomet consultant for writing this article.

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