

Your Joint Replacement Journey

*****Your Joint Replacement Journey: An Overview (Part 1)*****

Narrator

Joint replacements are common procedures, and they can be very effective for easing pain and getting you active again.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

The main reasons for a hip or knee replacement is for pain relief and improvement in function and for correction of any deformities in a patient who has not improved with conservative treatment such as pain medications anti-inflammatory medications physical therapy, injections, weight loss or any other activity modification.

Narrator

Gina White, a former college athlete, started considering hip replacement surgery after years of overuse.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

I played volleyball in college, I played little bit after college and I did some heavy lifting as well. It started to wear down, it was causing some pain. So, I went to the doctor just to kind of talk about my options and he told me that it was in need of a hip replacement.

Narrator

Tony Rios, a nurse anesthetist who served in the Army, decided to have his knee replaced because of pain that was interfering with his life.

Tony Rios, Knee Replacement Recipient

I was becoming sort of isolated because of the pain. I used to be very active tennis, gardening, things like that. I was refusing to participate in different activities. I hated to walk for long periods, I mean a long ways and then I had to sit down and wait.

Narrator

To determine whether surgery is appropriate, doctors use x-rays, MRIs or other images which help them see how much joint damage there is.

As Gina found, it's important to learn all you can about the procedure beforehand so you'll know what to expect.

One way is through patient education materials from the National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses. Another option is a joint replacement class, which some hospitals offer to help patients prepare for surgery.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

At first I laughed because I was like, who would take a 3-hour class regarding hip replacement? But when I attended the class the information they gave was very important and I actually ended up using the majority of that when I returned home from hip replacement.

Narrator

The process includes a medical evaluation by your primary medical doctor or other providers to ensure you're physically ready for surgery. You will need blood and urine tests, possibly a chest x-ray and an EKG to see how strong your heart is.

If you smoke, now is the time to quit. Smoking can affect blood flow and slow your recovery after surgery. Ask your doctor to help you find a method, like nicotine replacement that will help you kick the habit.

For optimal recovery, it's also important to be in good shape before you go in for your joint replacement.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

I tell all my patients to exercise anyway they can, anything they can do to strengthen their hip or knee before surgery is only going to make it easier for them to recover and actually may make some of the pain go away before surgery.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

My doctor gave me a series of exercises to do. I was pretty much 2 months away from my surgery at the time. He said that they were going to be pretty easy, which they were. But I did them religiously up until my surgery. When I returned home and I was able, I started doing the exercises again and they were much harder. And I understood why they had you start so early with the exercises.

Narrator

Prior to your surgery, you'll go over the procedure with your doctor.

Ask if you need to stop taking any of your medicines.

The night before your surgery, take a shower. Wash your whole body with antibacterial soap, paying special attention to the area that will be operated on. This will help prevent infection.

Don't shave your legs. The hospital staff will use clippers if it needs to be done.

Don't eat or drink anything after midnight on the night before your surgery unless instructed otherwise by your physician.

There are some instances where you might need to drink water to take required medicines. Your physician will provide specific instructions if this is the case.

You'll check into the hospital a few hours before your joint replacement is scheduled. Once there, you'll meet your surgical team.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

That includes a nurse, often times your anesthesiologist at that point as well as an anesthesia PA or nurse.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

They were all pretty helpful but the one who stands out the most was my anesthesiologist. He was extremely detailed about what to expect and what those feelings would be.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

The two types of anesthesia we normally do would be a general anesthetic where you are completely sedated. The other type is a regional and in most cases a spinal anesthetic where they put a small injection of some numbing medicine into your back which then numbs your legs for a couple of hours which gives us time to do the surgery.

Narrator

Joint replacement can be done with open surgery. Or sometimes, minimally invasive surgery is used. That means it's done through very small cuts. During the procedure, your surgeon will make a cut over the knee or hip to expose the joint. Damaged cartilage and pieces of bone will be removed. Then the damaged joint will be replaced with a man-made metal and plastic joint. Your surgery should last one to two hours.

Most people who have a joint replacement see a dramatic improvement in pain and the ability to function afterwards as Tony Rios did.

Tony Rios, Knee Replacement Recipient

Six weeks after surgery we decided to go to Mexico and just about everywhere you go everywhere, anywhere you go, you got 10 steps down and 10 steps up. During that trip my knee felt great. In other words the pain was gone.

Narrator

To learn what to expect as you recover watch “Your Joint Replacement Journey: Recovery (Part 2).”

Your Joint Replacement Journey: Recovery (Part 2)

Narrator

Once your joint replacement surgery is over, your recovery begins.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

After surgery you’ll wake up from the anesthesia in the recovery room.

Narrator

Nurses and other staff will monitor your breathing, pulse, and other vital signs. You’ll stay in the recovery room for around an hour or two until the anesthesia fully wears off and you’re awake.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

Most of the time, once patients are stable and awake, they’re taken to a location where they recover from the surgery and that may be anywhere from a few hours to a few days depending on their progress.

Narrator

Your surgeon and the rest of your health care team will decide whether it’s safe for you to go home on the same day as your surgery.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

A lot of it's just preference of the patients as well as the surgeon. If the surgeon wants them to spend the night, we're going to hold onto them obviously. But if the patient is eager to go home and is comfortable and is walking and clears physical therapy and all those things get checked off then going home is certainly an option for some patients.

Narrator

In some cases, patients may have to go to a rehabilitation or nursing facility before returning home.

Gina White was able to do her hip replacement as same-day surgery.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

I reported to the hospital around 8. I had a scheduled surgery at 10 o'clock. By, I'm going to say 7:30 that evening after meeting with my physical therapist, we both felt that it was ok for me to go home.

Narrator

You’ll probably be in some pain after your surgery, but you’ll get medicines by mouth or through an IV to relieve it. Narcotics are effective pain relievers, but they’re strong and can have side effects such as drowsiness, impaired judgment, and constipation.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

If we can use non-narcotic medications such as anti-inflammatories or acetaminophen or Tylenol then those I think are preferred. When you go home, I encourage all my patients to take those medications if they can tolerate them and if they need their narcotic medication on top of it and then I encourage them to take it.

Narrator

After surgery, blood can pool in your leg and form clots. To prevent this, your doctor will put you on blood thinners. Your treatment team will also encourage you to move your leg and ankle to keep the blood flowing. They may put a sleeve called a compression device around your leg. The sleeve will inflate and deflate to gently squeeze your leg. This helps move the blood and prevent clots.

Or you may wear elastic compression stockings that put constant pressure on the blood vessels in your leg. This keeps blood flowing so it doesn't pool. Sometimes, your health care professional may have you use both a sleeve and stockings.

To prevent other complications, you may be told to take deep breaths after surgery.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

While you're in surgery you don't fill up your lungs quite as much as you normally do when you're not under anesthesia and it's also a real common cause of a fever after surgery. So, I think that by taking deep breaths after surgery you reduce the likelihood of a fever or any other issues with your lungs.

Narrator

Following surgery you'll meet with a physical therapist, who helps patients learn to do activities of daily living.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

My physical therapist was great. She came in and walked through everything that we were going to try to do at that point. One of the things was she wanted to make sure I could walk, she wanted to make sure that I could use the stairs correctly, which foot goes up first. She wanted to make sure that I could go to the bathroom, or use the bath or the shower correctly.

Narrator

You'll also learn how to change your surgical dressing and how to take your medicines.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

Recovery was definitely a team effort. Working with all of the specialists on my doctor's team. They helped me understand what I can expect.

Narrator

Knowing what to expect can help you recognize surgery complications. If you have them, it's important to alert your doctor right away so you can avoid making a trip back to the hospital.

To find out what to expect once you get home, watch "Your Joint Replacement Journey: Transitioning Home (Part 3)"

*****Your Joint Replacement Journey: Transitioning Home (Part 3)*****

Narrator

Before she had hip replacement surgery, Gina White prepared her home so it would be safer and easier to live in during her recovery.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

The importance of preparing the home after surgery is really so that you have a smooth recovery and you don't put yourself at risk from any falls afterwards.

Narrator

For example, put away loose rugs as Gina did and if possible put your bed on the main floor.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

I slept in our living room on a blow up bed because it was higher and it made it a little bit easier to get in and out of.

Narrator

Move items you often use to low shelves or put them on countertops so you don't have to climb or reach.

Use simple tools like grabbers, long-handled shoehorns and zipper pulls to make it easier to pick up items and get dressed. In the bathroom, grab bars, a shower chair, and a raised toilet seat can also be helpful.

Your doctor, nurses, and physical therapist will send you home with a discharge plan.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

A discharge plan after joint replacement surgery is a plan to have everything ready and available afterwards. And that included how to care for your new joint.

Narrator

Key questions to ask your providers before leaving the hospital include:

- How do I change my dressing and care for my wound?
- Can I shower or take a bath and if so what special care should I use?
- How much weight can I put on the new joint?
- How much can I walk each day?
- Which exercises should I do and which should I avoid?
- When can I drive again?
- When will my stitches be removed?
- When is my first follow-up appointment?
- What are signs that something is wrong with my new hip or knee?
- And when should I call you?

You should also ask what medicines you'll be taking, when to take them, and for how long. Find out if there are any precautions or side effects you should be aware of.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

The type of medications you'll receive after surgery often include a blood thinner of some type and possibly a stool softener. Blood thinners are used to prevent blood clots after surgery. Blood clots are a complication we're trying to avoid so you want to talk to your doctor and his team or his and her team about what their plan is for that and what your expected to take. The stool softeners certainly would keep things more regular when you're on narcotic medication which have a very common side effect of constipation.

Narrator

You'll be prescribed pain medication to relieve any discomfort. Don't try to skip the medicine and tough out the pain.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

When I returned home the first and second day after surgery the pain was manageable. But one of the things they teach you in the class is that your third or fourth day will be your worst days as far as pain. Those were the days that I definitely used the pain medication that they had prescribed.

Narrator

Pain medicines can cause side effects like drowsiness, confusion, itching, constipation, and stomach upset. If you have side effects, talk to your doctor.

Take only the amount of medication your doctor prescribed, and follow their instructions on when to decrease the dose or stop using the medicine.

If you're taking blood thinners, your doctor might recommend avoiding foods high in vitamin K like Brussels sprouts, green beans, spinach and kale, which can interact with these medicines.

To prevent infection, remember to keep your wound clean and dry.

Follow your surgeon's instructions for changing the dressing.

Always wash your hands with soap and water before you touch the wound.

It's also important to follow the instructions of your physical therapist, whom you'll see a few times a week.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

Once you start outpatient physical therapy our objectives are to build your strength up and increase your range of motion. When you have more strength and you have a greater range of motion you'll be able to perform transfers, you'll be able to walk better and lastly be able to go up and down stairs more effectively.

Narrator

Physical therapy exercises also helped children's book author Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz gradually regain strength after hip replacement surgery.

Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz, Hip Replacement Recipient

My doctor said, if you want to keep this hip I want you to do bed exercises, leg lifts. And I said, "What?" and he said, "Fifty a day on each side." And I said, "No way." He said, "Start with one. Build up to fifty." So, I did, and to this day 17 years later I still have the same hip, and I do it every single morning.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

It's important to do the exercises that we provide. We know what will help build your strength and once your strength is improved, so will your function.

Narrator

To keep moving during recovery, you may need a walker or cane.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

Immediately postoperative most patients are going to start using a walker. Either a standard walker, which means you have four legs, or a rolling walker which have wheels in the front.

Gina White, Hip Replacement Recipient

I used it for about 2 1/2 weeks after surgery and then progressed to using the cane.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

It's a nice transition from the walker to the cane because it's much easier to carry around. You can put it in the front seat and you can get in and out of your car more easily. But the strength is the most important part of that, you got have it in order to transition from the walker to the cane.

Narrator

Most of the time, knee and hip replacements have good results. But a small number of people will have to go back to the hospital for complications. To prevent these complications, follow your discharge plan, watch out for warning signs, and call your doctor if you notice them.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

Things that I would want to patient to inform me about after surgery is if they have a high fever that doesn't respond to medication, any drainage that's more than a day or two especially if it's a darker color and not just a clear color. I would want to know about any persistent redness or swelling, now this is a little hard because knee replacements all look red and swollen, but if it's concerning to them we certainly need to know about it. Any calf pain or swelling, swelling in the leg that doesn't respond to elevation. Shortness of breath or chest pain I would tell them to consider calling 911 as well as us to inform us of what's going on.

Narrator

By following your providers' instructions, you'll be back to your old routine before you know it.

To learn more about how you'll recover, watch "Your Joint Replacement Journey: Returning to Activity (Part 4)."

*****Your Joint Replacement Journey: Returning to Activity (Part 4)*****

Narrator

A week or two after your knee or hip replacement, you can start focusing on regaining movement in the new joint and getting back to regular activities.

It took Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz time and some effort to recover from her two hip surgeries.

Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz, Hip Replacement Recipient

I had to walk, walk, walk to build up my durability and my muscles. I realized that no one was going to do this for me. I had to do it. And I did.

Narrator

At first, you'll keep using your walker, cane, or crutches to get around. Gradually, you'll be able to put more and more weight on the leg.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

For most people one to two weeks from the walker into the cane is how long it will take. And then from the cane to nothing at all is different for everyone, there is no specific guideline but it's all based on strength and balance and the mechanics in which you're walking.

Narrator

To make sure your recovery goes smoothly, see your doctor for all scheduled appointments and keep doing the physical therapy exercises that were prescribed.

Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz, Hip Replacement Recipient

I can tell if I haven't done my exercises. It's harder for me to walk.

Narrator

You may have needed medicine to manage your pain right after surgery. And you'll need it for the first few weeks afterward so you're comfortable enough to exercise. But you should be able to start taking less medicine by about 3 weeks after surgery. If you're still in pain then, or you're having trouble stopping your pain pills, talk to your doctor.

You can also try other methods to manage pain, like ice, massage, or relaxation techniques. How long it takes you to get back to normal after surgery depends on you.

Dr. Stephen Kim, Orthopedic Surgeon

The speed of recovery has a lot to do with the patient's physical conditioning and their pre-operative range of motion especially for the knees. However on average most patients are walking fairly comfortably after about 4 to 6 weeks after a hip replacement and about 6 to 8 weeks after a knee replacement.

Narrator

And speaking of walking, it's a great way to stay active and strengthen your new joint and the muscles around it. Swimming is another good, non-impact exercise for your new joint.

To avoid a fall that might damage your joint, get rid of any tripping hazards at home like loose cords, throw rugs, or uneven floorboards. Put non-slip mats in your shower or tub, and on your bathroom floor. Make sure all the hallways and stairways in your home are well lit. And wear shoes with rubber, non-slip soles.

Also, you may need to make some changes in how you do everyday tasks.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

Some activities of daily living will be much more challenging. Lifting an object off the floor, getting down to pick up an object off the floor because your knee or hip doesn't bend very well.

Narrator

To make things easier:

- Sit in a chair while taking a shower. Use a long-handled sponge to reach your back and legs.
- Use a dressing stick to help pull on your underwear and pants.
- Use a long-handled shoehorn and sock pull to put on your shoes and socks.
- Also learn the right way to use stairs.
- To get out of a chair, slide toward the front and use the arms to pull yourself up.
- When traveling by car, get in from street level not the curb. Recline the back of the seat and push it all the way back. Put a pillow on the seat so you don't have to bend your knees as much while getting in and out.

Ask your doctor when it's safe to get back to activities like working.

Dr. Mark Hanna, Orthopedic Surgeon

I think this is very patient dependent and also depends upon the type of work the patient does. If you're on your feet all day long like a nursing position or something like that it's going to take probably six weeks before you're ready to do that type of work. If you're at a more sedentary job where you're sitting at a desk then it could be 3 to 4 weeks before you're ready to return.

Narrator

By 3 months after your surgery, you should be able to do low-impact exercises, like swimming, golfing, and cycling. Check with your doctor or physical therapist to make sure it's safe for you to start.

Brad Dale, Physical Therapist

Postoperatively we recommend people being active. A sedentary lifestyle is going to create a stiff joint. It also will cause people to gain weight. If we can get them moving and keep them moving for the rest of their lives not only is it going to protect the joint but it's also going to keep the weight off which will protect the joint as well.

Narrator

Within a few months after your surgery, you should regain most or all of your strength. And now that you're free from hip or knee pain, you can return to many of the activities you enjoy.

Babs Bell Hadjusiewicz, Hip Replacement Recipient

I dragged my leg for seven years and had so much pain and was so limited in everything. After the surgery and the exercising I had all the endurance again and I was able to walk the dog, I'm able to go up and down stairs. I'm to do everything and I have no pain. It's wonderful.

Narrator

To learn more about hip and knee replacements, watch "Your Joint Replacement Journey: An Overview (Part 1)."

Reviewed by:

Deb Valentine MSN, CCM, ONC,
Clinical Care Coordinator for the Orthopedic and Spine Institute, Stamford Health

Elizabeth Turcotte, MSN, RN-BC, ONC,
Nurse Manager, Orthopaedic Institute of Central Main

Jennifer Drake, MSN, RN, ONC,
Clinical Educator Inova Fairfax Hospital

© 2015 The Wellness Network, All Rights Reserved