

Joint Replacement: Understanding Your Discharge Instructions

“I just want to go over your discharge instructions, okay?”

“Okay.”

When it is time for you to leave the hospital after joint replacement surgery, a member of your healthcare team will visit you and go over specific guidelines for you to follow to ensure a healthy and speedy recovery.

You may be going home to continue your recovery with outpatient therapy sessions, or you may be going to an inpatient rehabilitation center for your next recovery phase. No matter where you spend the next phase of your recovery, you must follow your discharge instructions carefully to reduce your risk of complications.

Before you leave the hospital, you will receive a written discharge plan designed specifically for you. Your discharge plan will include information on pain management; incision care; physical activity guidelines, including what you can and can't do over the next few weeks; physical and occupational therapy information and how often to do your breathing exercises.

It will detail the medications you are prescribed, including how much and when to take them. Pay special attention to any new prescriptions or over the counter medications you are given for pain and preventing blood clots.

Medications may cause side effects, like constipation. Talk to your healthcare provider now, before you leave the hospital, about what to do if you experience any side effects. Your discharge plan will also include when you can resume your normal activities like returning to work and driving. Note the date of your follow-up appointment on your discharge plan. It will probably be scheduled a few weeks after you leave the hospital.

This is a lot of information. Don't be afraid to ask questions and make sure you know who to call if you have any additional questions once you get home. It may help to have a family member or friend with you to help you remember all of the information given.

On the day you are discharged, you may feel healthy and excited to be leaving the hospital. But your body is still healing. You may tire out faster than you're used to. Take a few minutes to rest before you leave.

Since you can't drive yet, have a family member or friend drive you home. Ask your healthcare provider how to get in and out of the car safely. In the car, be careful around your incision site. Your body has been through a lot but you are ready to leave the hospital and move onto your next phase of recovery. At discharge, make sure you understand all of your instructions clearly in order to continue to recover quickly and safely.