

Shoulder Replacement Surgery: Returning Home

After you have shoulder replacement surgery, it'll take some time to get back your strength and movement.

It can help to be patient with yourself as you recover.

When you leave the hospital, you'll be wearing a sling.

The sling is a good reminder not to move your shoulder on your own until your doctor says it's okay.

Your fingers, hand, and arm may feel stiff from not moving much while your arm is in the sling.

Make sure you move your fingers, flex and straighten your wrist, and fully straighten your elbow at least a few times every day.

Your doctor will talk to you about when you can drive, work, and go back to your usual daily activities.

At first, you'll probably need to use your other hand when you eat and brush your teeth.

You may be able to do things like type on a keyboard, use a mouse, and write as long as you're able to keep your upper arm close by your side.

You'll need someone to help you at home until you have more energy and can move around better.

You'll work with a physical, or physio-, therapist to get back your strength and flexibility.

You'll start with gentle exercises, like dangling your arm and moving it in small circles.

You are an important part of the recovery process.

By taking an active part in therapy and doing the exercises at home in between sessions, you can continue to gain strength and movement for up to a year after surgery.

If you have pain, try using an ice pack for about 10 to 20 minutes a few times each day.

Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

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If your doctor recommended cold therapy using a portable machine, follow the directions that came with the machine.

Keep your arm next to your body or in front of it at all times for as long as your doctor recommends.

This may be for several weeks.

You may find it's more comfortable to sleep in a recliner chair at first.

Try placing a small stack of folded sheets or towels behind your upper arm any time you are reclining or lying down.

This will keep your arm from dropping too far back.

Be sure to follow any instructions about diet or activity and take medicines as prescribed.

And follow any instructions the doctor gives you about incision care.

Be sure to keep your bandage clean and dry.

If the bandage gets wet or shows signs of drainage, remove it and put on a clean, dry bandage.

Ask your doctor when you can take the bandage off and when it's okay to shower.

Having shoulder replacement surgery can increase your risk for a blood clot.

So it's important to keep moving.

Try to limit your time in bed. Get up and walk around every couple of hours during the day.

Here are some things to watch for.

Call your doctor if you have any bleeding or signs of infection, such as increased pain, swelling, warmth or redness; or pus draining from the incision; or a fever.

Also watch for signs of a blood clot.

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These include arm pain and swelling away from the surgery site; calf or leg pain; redness or any change in color; swelling in the leg or groin; shortness of breath; or chest pain.

These are serious symptoms. If you have any of them, get emergency help right away.

And call your doctor if you have tingling, weakness, or numbness in your arm; or your arm turns cold or changes color.

Now, this may seem like a lot to keep track of—keeping up with your exercises, taking your medicines, and watching for signs of a blood clot or infection.

But all these things are important. They can help you heal and feel better.

And remember, if you have any questions, you can always call your doctor.