ONS Orthopaedic & Neurosurgery Specialists

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AFTER JOINT REPLACEMENT

The following frequently asked questions are provided to guide you through the early recovery period after joint replacement surgery. This resource outlines general postoperative expectations and timelines. Please always follow the specific instructions provided by your surgeon, as individual recommendations may vary.

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IS POSTOPERATIVE SWELLING NORMAL?

Yes. Postoperative swelling is normal after joint replacement.

Within the first several days: Swelling may increase during the first several days after surgery and often worsens by the end of the day. This swelling can persist for 4–6 weeks. Continue to elevate the leg while you are not walking, as elevation helps reduce fluid buildup in the operative limb. If swelling involves the calf, please contact our office to speak with a clinician.

Beyond 6 weeks: Some swelling can persist for up to 1 year after surgery. The operative joint may also feel warm, which is normal and related to healing and inflammation. Swelling may increase with activity. Elevation and icing are recommended after increased activity.

HOW LONG SHOULD I TAKE ASPIRIN AFTER SURGERY?

Aspirin should be taken for 35 days from the date of surgery, unless otherwise directed.

CAN I HAVE AN MRI AFTER JOINT REPLACEMENT?

Yes. Modern joint replacement implants are MRI compatible.

WHEN CAN I START SHOWERING?

You may shower as soon as you arrive home, as your incision will be covered with a waterproof dressing. Do not immerse or soak the incision in a bath, pool, or hot tub. Allow water to gently run over the area without scrubbing. After showering, pat the incision dry with a clean towel.

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WHEN CAN I REMOVE MY BANDAGE?

Your surgical dressing may be removed 7 days from the date of surgery, unless otherwise instructed.

WHEN WILL I HEAR FROM MY PHYSICAL THERAPIST?

Your in-home physical therapy agency will contact you within 24–48 hours after surgery to coordinate your initial visit. If you have not been contacted within that timeframe, please notify our office so we may assist you.

WHEN WILL I START PHYSICAL THERAPY?

- In-home physical therapy begins approximately 24-48 hours after surgery.
- Outpatient physical therapy typically begins 2 weeks after your surgical date.

WHEN CAN I DRIVE?

Driving clearance will be addressed at your 2-week postoperative appointment. Driving prior to formal clearance is not permitted.

WHEN CAN I FLY AFTER SURGERY?

Air travel is generally permitted 6 weeks after surgery. Unless otherwise directed, take a baby aspirin the day before travel, the day of travel, and the day after travel.

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WILL MY IMPLANT SET OFF AIRPORT METAL DETECTORS?

It is possible. However, no special documentation is required. Airport security follows standard screening protocols for individuals with joint replacements. Joint replacement procedures are very common, and security personnel are familiar with these implants.

WHEN CAN I SWIM (POOL, OCEAN, OR HOT TUB)?

Swimming is permitted 6 weeks after surgery. This includes pools, oceans, and hot tubs.

WHEN CAN I RETURN TO SPORTS (E.G., PICKLEBALL, RUNNING, CYCLING)?

Most patients may resume sports activities at approximately 6 weeks, provided they are progressing appropriately in physical therapy.

IS CLICKING IN MY OPERATIVE LEG NORMAL?

Yes. Mild clicking is common after joint replacement and is not typically a cause for concern. It often improves over time with continued rehabilitation.

IS BRUISING ON MY OPERATIVE LEG NORMAL?

Yes. Bruising is common after joint replacement surgery and may extend over a significant portion of the thigh. It is also normal for bruising to travel down the leg with gravity and may even appear as low as the foot.

Please contact our office if the bruising is associated with severe or worsening pain, significant swelling, or any other concerning symptoms.