

# PATIENT HANDBOOK AND JOURNAL

## FAQ

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## **What is the recovery time for a total hip replacement?**

- » This generally takes about three months. Everyone heals at a different pace so this time frame will vary from patient to patient. Most often you will use a walker or crutches for about one month after your surgery. Then you move to a cane outdoors and no support around the house for several weeks. You return to normal activities gradually after that.

## **What is a dislocation of the hip?**

- » Although this happens, less than 2% of the time, it does occur. A dislocation occurs when the ball (femoral head) comes out of the socket (acetabulum).

## **What precautions should I take to avoid a hip dislocation?**

- » You should avoid bending at the hip more than 90°. When sitting, a solid chair with arms is best. The chair should not be too low. Sit with your legs positioned so that you can see your inner thigh, calf, and foot, not the outside of your leg. If you need to reach to the floor when seated, reach between your legs, not out to the side. Use an elevated toilet seat to avoid excessive flexing at the hip.

## **How long do I need to follow my dislocation precautions after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Follow your precautions very carefully for the first 6 weeks. You should avoid extreme positions of hip flexion (bending) forever.

## **When can I discontinue using a raised toilet seat after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » 6 to 10 weeks is the recommended time frame. It varies per individual.

## **Can I sleep on my side after total hip replacement?**

- » You may sleep on your operative side whenever you feel comfortable. You may sleep on your non-operative side at 4 weeks with a pillow between your knees.

## **When do my stitches come out after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Your stitches are absorbable and do not need to be removed. The steri-strips that have been applied can be kept in place until they fall off on their own. They will help keep the skin edges together. If they have not fallen off by 3 weeks, you may peel them off.

## **How long do I need a bandage after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You need a bandage for approximately 1 week after total hip replacement surgery. A dry sterile gauze should be reapplied daily. You may continue to wear a bandage to protect from irritation if you like.

## **When can I shower (get incision wet) after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » If there is not drainage at the incision you may shower after three days. Initially, try to keep the incision dry with a plastic wrap. If the incision gets wet, pat it dry.

## **When can I immerse my hip in water (e.g., bath, swimming pool, ocean, hot tub) after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Again, if there is no drainage from the incision you may immerse your hip in water after two weeks.

### **How long will I be on pain medication after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You will likely require some form of pain medication for about 3 months after total hip replacement surgery. At first you will be on a strong oral pain medication (such as a narcotic). After the first month most people are able to wean off from the narcotic. At this point they are able to switch to an over-the-counter pain medication (such as Tylenol or ibuprofen). If you are on Coumadin (warfarin), avoid taking any NSAIDs (e.g., aspirin, ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naprosyn) without first consulting your physician.

### **Will I go to rehabilitation or home after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Many factors are considered in this decision. Considerations include availability of friends and family to assist with daily activities, home environment, safety considerations, post-operative functional status as evaluated by the physical therapist in the hospital and overall evaluation of the hospital team. So it depends. Many people do go home after their total hip replacement surgery. However, some do go to a rehabilitation facility to regain skills needed to return home safely.

### **Do I need physical therapy after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Yes! Your therapist will help you walk, regain motion, build strength, and reach your post-operative goals. Your therapist will keep your surgeon informed of your progress. The physical therapist plays a very important role in your recovery after total hip replacement surgery. You will see a physical therapist soon after your operation and throughout your stay at the hospital. If you go home, you will likely have a therapist come to visit you (usually 2-3 times a week). Sometimes, you will be referred to an outpatient physical therapist. If you go to a rehabilitation facility, you will receive therapy there.

### **What exercises should I do after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You will be given a list of appropriate exercises to do by the physical therapist. Generally swimming and a stationary bicycle are good options. These exercises should be continued indefinitely, even after you recover from your surgery. Do not use the stationary bicycle until you are at 4 weeks past surgery.

### **I think my leg lengths are different after total hip replacement surgery. What should I do?**

- » It is not uncommon to feel as though your leg lengths are different after total hip replacement surgery. At surgery, leg lengths are assessed very carefully and an attempt is made to make them as equal as possible. Sometimes, the new hip has to be lengthened in order to obtain proper muscle tension (to help avoid hip dislocation). Wait 3 months before making any final judgments about your leg lengths. Your muscles and body take time to adjust to a new hip. In rare cases, a shoe lift may be prescribed for a true difference in leg lengths. In most cases, however, no treatment is necessary.

### **Can I use weights after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You should not use weights for the first 2 months after surgery. Since everyone's strength varies, consult with your physical therapist before using weights. You will naturally begin with 1 lb and build to a 5 lb maximum.

### **How long will I be on a "blood thinner" after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You may be on Coumadin (warfarin) as a "blood thinner." This medication is used to help prevent blood clots. You will start on Coumadin with a dose the night before surgery and continue while you are hospitalized. You will stay on Coumadin for 4 to 6 weeks. It is important to have your blood thinner level checked regularly and your Coumadin dose adjusted accordingly.

**How long should I take iron supplements after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Iron stores may be depleted post-operatively. Taking iron supplements for about 4 weeks after surgery is usually sufficient.

**If I am constipated after total hip replacement surgery what should I do?**

- » A simple over the counter stool softener, like Colace, is helpful in preventing this problem. In rare instances a suppository or enema may be required. Rest assured it is common to have this problem following surgery. A variety of things can cause it, narcotic pain medication is a common cause.

**When can I drive after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You should wait at least 1 month if you had surgery on your right hip. After 1 month, you may begin driving as you feel comfortable. If you had surgery on your left hip, you may return to driving as you feel comfortable as long as you have an automatic transmission. Be careful getting in and out of a car, and avoid crossing your operated leg over the other. **DO NOT DRIVE IF TAKING NARCOTICS.**

**When can I return to work after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » This will depend on your profession. Typically, if your work is primarily sedentary, you may return after approximately 1 month. If your work is more rigorous, you may require up to 3 months before you can return to full duty. In some cases, more time may be necessary.

**When can I travel after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » When you feel comfortable after your surgery you may travel. It is important that you get up to stretch or walk at least once an hour when taking long trips to prevent blood clots.

**Will I set off the machines at airport security after total hip replacement surgery? Do I need a doctor's note about my surgery?**

- » This does occur, depending on the type of airport security equipment and what type of implant you have, we no longer provide a note/card about your implant. Airport security will screen you if necessary.

**What activities are permitted following total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You may return to most activities as tolerated after total hip replacement surgery, including walking, gardening, and golf. Some of the best activities to help with motion and strengthening are swimming and a stationary bicycle.

**What activities should I avoid after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You should avoid impact activities, such as running and downhill skiing on expert slopes, and vigorous racquet sports, such as singles tennis or squash. In addition, you should avoid any activity that may put your new hip at risk for dislocation.

**Can I have sex after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You should wait several weeks post-operatively before resuming sexual intercourse. Follow your hip dislocation precautions. Having your legs apart is a safe position.

**Can I drink alcohol after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » You should not drink alcohol if you are on Coumadin or a narcotic medication. Otherwise you may have alcohol at your own discretion.

**How long should I use compression stockings (TEDS) after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Compression stockings are used to help reduce swelling and improve circulation. They are recommended for the first few weeks. You may wear them longer if your ankles swell without them.

**Should I use ice or heat after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Ice should be used for the first several days after total hip replacement surgery, particularly if you have a lot of swelling or discomfort. Once the initial swelling has decreased, you may use ice and/or heat.

**Can I go up and down stairs after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Yes. Initially, you will lead with your non-operated leg when going up stairs and lead with your operated leg when going down stairs. You can use the phrase, “Up with the good, down with bad” to help you remember. As your leg gets stronger, you will be able to perform on stairs in a more regular pattern (about 1 month).

**Can I kneel after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Yes, you can kneel 6 weeks after total hip replacement surgery. When kneeling, touch-down with your operative knee first. To get up from kneeling, use your non-operative leg first.

**What should I expect for my range of motion (ROM) at 6 weeks? At 1 year?**

- » Everyone’s range of motion (ROM) varies and depends on individual factors. Your potential will be determined at the time of your surgery. In most cases, you will have enough motion to put on socks and tie your shoes. Clipping toenails may be difficult.

**Do I need antibiotics before dental work or an invasive procedure after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Yes. You will be given a letter explaining this in detail at your first follow-up visit. Avoid any dental cleaning or non-urgent procedures for 3 months post-operatively.

**I feel depressed after total hip replacement surgery. Is this normal?**

- » It is not uncommon to feel depressed after hip replacement surgery. These feelings of depression generally go away as you begin to return to your normal activities. Limited mobility, discomfort, increased dependency on other people, and side effects of medication can all contribute to these feelings of depression. If these feeling persist speak with your internist.

**I have insomnia after total hip replacement surgery. Is this normal? What can I do about it?**

- » Insomnia is a common complaint following hip replacement surgery. Non-prescription remedies such as Benadryl or melatonin may be effective. If insomnia continues to be a problem, medication may be prescribed for you.

**How long will my total hip replacement last?**

- » This varies from patient to patient. For each year following your hip replacement, you have a 1% chance of requiring additional surgery. For example, at 10 years post-operatively, there is a 90% success rate.

**When do I need to follow-up with my surgeon after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » Follow-up appointments should be made post-operatively at 4-6 weeks, 1 year, 2 years, 5 years, 7 years, and 10 years.

**Who should I call with questions after total hip replacement surgery?**

- » In the case of an emergency, call 911. For all other inquiries during the day, call the surgeon’s office and ask for the nurse triage line. After business hours, listen to the recording and follow the instructions. Most calls will be returned within 1 business day.

<b>Normal things about your New Hip</b>	<b>Abnormal Things about your New Hip Call the office immediately if you experience:</b>
Clicking noise with hip motion	Increasing redness, particularly spreading from the incision
Skin numbness near or around the incision	Increasing pain and swelling
Swelling around hip, knee, and/or lower leg	Fever > 101.5 F
Warmth around the hip	Persistent drainage from your wound
“Pins and needles” feeling at or near the incision	Calf swelling or pain, particularly associated with ankle motion
Dark or red incision line. This will gradually fade to a lighter color	A sudden “giving away” of your hip with inability to bear weight
Increased bruising if on Coumadin	Ankles swelling that does not decrease or resolve overnight
	Bleeding gums or blood in urine/stool