

## Orthopaedics

# Knee Replacement surgery Patient information



## Knee Replacement surgery

Whilst you are waiting for your Knee replacement surgery, you may find it useful to read this patient leaflet which we hope you will find helpful. The leaflet has been developed by the expert clinicians carrying out your care. This booklet explains what cataract surgery is, what the benefits and possible complications of surgery are, recovery after surgery and much more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you are able to support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital. The guidance has been written by clinicians who are responsible for your care.

### Guidance for Patients

Whilst you await your Knee replacement surgery, there are many things that you can do to support your health and wellbeing. The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust website includes a variety of useful information including health and support with mental wellbeing, addiction, guidance for parents and carers, exercise and practical help that you may find useful. You can find the website using this link: [www.sath.nhs.uk](http://www.sath.nhs.uk)

### Further links which may help you manage your condition whilst you await treatment:

[www.patientaccess.com/](http://www.patientaccess.com/) (Connect to your GP services online)

[www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/)

### What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you have an appointment, and you feel that your symptoms are worsening, then please call our switchboard numbers. If you are yet to receive your outpatient clinic appointment, and you feel that your symptoms are worsening, then see your GP.

Further resources for helping patients manage whilst waiting for treatment;

<https://escape-pain.org/>

<https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/ways-to-move/five-in-five>

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/>

[https://central.movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-](https://central.movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/MSK_Patient_info_leaflet_2020.pdf)

[content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/MSK Patient info leaflet 2020.pdf](https://central.movingmedicine.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/MSK_Patient_info_leaflet_2020.pdf)

### Preparing for Surgery.

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The contents of this information has been reviewed and approved by the Musculoskeletal Committee of Royal Shrewsbury & Telford Hospital.

We recommend that you Log in to JointPathways® TV

This is a useful website which contains informative and educational videos to help you prepare for your surgery and enhance your recovery.

<http://jointpathwaystv.com>

You will need a username and password. (See Below)

Please note that these contain some words with capital letters.

If you are having difficulty logging in, please carefully check for capital letters

**Username: TelfordKnee**

**Password: JointPathwaysTV**

JointPathways® TV

Logout

## Patient Education Film for Knee

### Chapter selection

PLAY ALL



3. TOTAL KNEE  
REPLACEMENT  
SURGERY



6. YOUR HOSPITAL  
STAY



1. INTRODUCTION



4. POST-OPERATIVE  
BENEFITS, RISKS &  
COMPLICATIONS



7. RETURNING  
HOME



2. ANATOMY &  
ARTHRITIS



5. PREPARATIONS  
FOR SURGERY



8. THIS IS YOUR  
FUTURE



## What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause damage to one or more joints.

Your surgeon has suggested a total knee replacement operation. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, it is important that you ask your surgeon or the healthcare team.

Once all your questions have been answered and you feel ready to go ahead with the procedure, you will be asked to sign the informed consent form. This is the final step in the decision-making process. However, you can still change your mind at any point.

## How does arthritis happen?

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, where there is gradual wear and tear of a joint. For a few people this is a result of a previous problem or injury but usually it happens without a known cause.

Some other types of arthritis are associated with inflammation of the joints that can eventually lead to severe joint damage. The most common is rheumatoid arthritis.

Arthritis wears away the normal cartilage covering the surface of the joint and the bone underneath becomes damaged. This causes pain and stiffness in the joint, which can interfere with normal activities.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get less pain and be able to walk more easily.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can help control the pain of arthritis. Check with your doctor before you take supplements.

Using a walking stick on the opposite side to the affected knee can make walking easier. Wearing an elasticated support on your knee can help it feel stronger.

Regular moderate exercise can help to reduce stiffness in your knee.

Physiotherapy may help to strengthen weak muscles.

If you are overweight, losing weight will help reduce the load on your knee.

A steroid injection into your knee joint can sometimes reduce pain and stiffness for several months. You may get side effects if you have injections too often. You should not have a steroid injection within 2 weeks of having a vaccination because it can prevent you from making enough antibodies.

All these measures become less effective if your arthritis gets worse and this is when your surgeon may recommend a knee replacement.

## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Arthritis of your knee usually, though not always, gets worse with time. Arthritis is not life-threatening in itself but it can be disabling.

Arthritis symptoms can be worse at some times than others, particularly when the weather is cold.

## What does the operation involve?

If you are female, the healthcare team may ask you to have a pregnancy test as some procedures involve x-rays or medications that can be harmful to unborn babies. Sometimes the test does not show an early-stage pregnancy so let the healthcare team know if you could be pregnant.

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct side. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you. You may also have injections of local anaesthetic to help with the pain after the operation.

You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. The operation usually takes an hour to 90 minutes.

There are many different types of knee replacement available and your surgeon will discuss the options with you.



A Total Knee Replacement

Your surgeon will make a cut on the front of your knee and remove the damaged joint surfaces. They will insert an artificial knee joint made of metal, plastic or ceramic, or a combination of these materials.

The implant is fixed to the bone using acrylic cement or special coatings that bond directly to the bone.

Your surgeon will close your skin with stitches or clips.

## What should I do about my medication?

Make sure your healthcare team knows about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

## What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound.

- In the week before the operation, do not shave or wax the area where a cut is likely to be made.
- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation.
- Keep warm around the time of the operation. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.
- If you are diabetic, keep your blood sugar levels under control around the time of your procedure.

If you have not had the coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccine, you may be at an increased risk of serious illness related to Covid-19 while you recover.

Speak to your doctor or healthcare team if you would like to have the vaccine.

## What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you. Some risks are higher if you are older, obese, you are a smoker or have other health problems. These health problems include diabetes, heart disease or lung disease.

Some complications can be serious and even cause death (risk: 1 in 300 in the first 3 months).

You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

### General complications of any operation

- Bleeding during or after the operation (risk: 1 in 300). You may need a blood transfusion.
- Infection of the surgical site (wound). It is usually safe to shower after 2 days but you should check with the healthcare team. Keep your wound dry and covered. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need special dressings and your wound may take some time to heal. In some cases another operation might be needed. Do not take antibiotics unless you are told you need them.

- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication. The healthcare team is trained to detect and treat any reactions that might happen. Let your doctor know if you have any allergies or if you have reacted to any medication or tests in the past.
- Acute kidney injury. A large drop in your blood pressure during the operation can damage your kidneys. Other risk factors include kidney disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and some medications. The healthcare team will monitor your condition closely to reduce the chance of this happening. Any kidney damage is usually short lived although some people may need to spend longer in hospital. A small number can go on to develop chronic kidney disease that may require dialysis.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis –DVT) (risk: 1 in 150). This can cause pain, swelling or redness in your leg, or the veins near the surface of your leg to appear larger than normal. However, most blood clots are small and settle without causing any problems. The healthcare team will assess your risk. They will encourage you to get out of bed soon after the operation and may give you injections, medication, or inflatable boots or special stockings to wear. Let the healthcare team know straight away if you think you might have a DVT.
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs (risk: 1 in 250). Let the healthcare team know straight away if you become short of breath, feel pain in your chest or upper back, or if you cough up blood. If you are at home, call an ambulance or go immediately to your nearest Emergency department.
- Difficulty passing urine. You may need a catheter (tube) in your bladder for 1 to 2 days.
- Chest infection (risk: 1 in 75). You may need antibiotics and physiotherapy. If you have the operation within 6 weeks of catching Covid-19, your risk of a chest infection is increased (see the 'Covid-19' section for more information).
- Heart attack (where part of the heart muscle dies) (risk: 1 in 500). A heart attack can sometimes cause death.
- Stroke (loss of brain function resulting from an interruption of the blood supply to your brain) (risk: 1 in 1,000). A stroke can sometimes cause death.

### **Specific complications of this operation**

- Damage to nerves around your knee, leading to weakness, numbness or pain in your leg or foot (risk: 1 in 175).
- Split in the bone when your knee replacement is inserted, if the bone is weak (risk: 1 in 1,000). Your surgeon may need to fix the bone, or use a different type of knee replacement.
- Damage to blood vessels behind your knee, leading to loss of circulation to your leg and foot (risk: 1 in 650). You will need surgery straight away to restore the blood flow.
- Damage to ligaments or tendons near your knee. Your surgeon may need to repair the damage using stitches, a piece of tendon from somewhere else in your body, or an artificial material.
- Infection in your knee, which can result in loosening and failure of your knee replacement (risk: 1 in 200 in the first 3 years after surgery). You will usually need one or more further operations to control the infection. If you get any kind of infection, including a dental infection, get it treated straight away as the infection could spread to your knee.
- Wear or loosening without infection. You may need another operation to do your knee replacement again (risk: 1 in 20 in the first 15 years).

- Dislocation of your knee replacement. You will usually need another operation, sometimes as an emergency.
- Continued discomfort in your knee, even though your knee replacement itself works well.
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your knee (complex regional pain syndrome - CRPS) (risk: 1 in 150). The cause is not known. You may need further treatment including painkillers and physiotherapy. Your knee can take months or years to improve. Sometimes there is permanent pain and stiffness.

## Covid-19

A recent Covid-19 infection increases your risk of lung complications or death if you have an operation under general anaesthetic. This risk reduces the longer it is since the infection. After 7 weeks the risk is no higher than someone who has not had Covid-19. However, if you still have symptoms the risk remains high. The risk also depends on your age, overall health and the type of surgery you are having.

You must follow instructions to self-isolate and take a Covid-19 test before your operation. If you have had Covid-19 up to 7 weeks before the operation you should discuss the risks and benefits of delaying it with your surgeon.

## Consequences of this procedure

- Pain. The healthcare team will give you medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as you are told so you can move about as advised.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin, although knee-replacement wounds usually heal to a neat scar.

## How soon will I recover?

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. You will usually have an x-ray to check the position of your knee replacement.

Good pain relief is important to help you to recover. If you are in pain, let the healthcare team know.

Getting out of bed and walking is an important part of your recovery. The physiotherapist will help you to start walking using crutches or a walking frame, usually on the day of surgery or the next day.

Getting your knee to bend takes hard work.

Keep your wound dry for 4 to 5 days, and use a waterproof dressing when you have a bath or shower.

The healthcare team will tell you if you need to have any stitches or clips removed, or dressings changed.

You can go home when your pain is under control, you can get about safely, and any care you may need has been arranged.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.



## Returning to normal activities

To reduce the risk of a blood clot, make sure you carefully follow the instructions of the healthcare team if you have been given medication or need to wear special stockings.

The healthcare team will tell you when you can return to normal activities. To reduce the risk of problems, it is important to look after your new knee as you are told. You will need to use walking aids until you can walk well without them.

If your knee replacement does not bend well, your surgeon may need to manipulate it (risk: 1 in 50). You will need to have an anaesthetic for this.

You will often notice a patch of numb skin next to the scar on your knee. This is normal after knee replacement surgery and usually becomes less noticeable with time.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you can control your vehicle, including in an emergency, and always check your insurance policy and with the healthcare team.

Ask your healthcare team if you need to do a Covid-19 test when you get home.

## The future

Most people make a good recovery, have less pain, and can move about better.

It is common for your leg to be swollen after a knee replacement. It can take up to a year for the swelling to go down.

An artificial knee never feels quite the same as a normal knee, and it is important to look after it in the long term. You can expect to be able to bend your knee 90 to 120 degrees. Kneeling down is not recommended and is usually uncomfortable.

A knee replacement can wear out with time. This depends on your body weight and how active you are. Eventually a worn knee replacement will need to be replaced. About 19 in 20 knee replacements will last 15 years.

## Summary

Arthritis of the knee usually happens without a known cause. For a few people it is a result of a previous knee injury or rheumatoid arthritis. If you have severe pain, stiffness and disability, a knee replacement should reduce your pain and help you to walk more easily.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

## **My Planned Care Patient Information Platform**

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## **Life Threatening Emergencies**

If you have severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999 immediately.

## **Contact Us**

If you have any concerns or questions that you need support with, our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a great place to start.

You can call 01743 261691 for the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital or 01952 641222 ext 4382 for the Princess Royal Hospital.

They will listen to you and advise you how they can help.

If you would prefer to get in touch by email, please contact [sath.pals@nhs.net](mailto:sath.pals@nhs.net)