

Knee replacement surgery

Introduction

Knee replacement surgery is an operation that involves replacing a damaged, worn or diseased knee with an artificial joint, with the aim of reducing pain. It will only be offered after other options have been tried but proven not to have relieved your symptoms, such as medication, weight loss if necessary, physiotherapy and exercise to reduce stiffness and improve muscle strength and the use of walking aids.

There are two main types of surgery:

Total knee replacement – where both sides of the knee joint are replaced.

Partial knee replacement – where the main part of the knee is replaced along with sometimes the knee cap.

Patients can go home as soon after surgery as they are deemed fit medically and they can cope with mobilising safely. This may be on the day of surgery or any time from the day after surgery. Some patients will have knee replacement surgery as a day case, meaning they don't have to stay in hospital overnight. Not every patient having a knee replacement is suitable for day case surgery but if you are a candidate this will have been discussed with you by your consultant.

Guidance for Patients

Stay as active as you can. If you can, continue to do gentle exercise, such as walking and swimming, in the weeks and months before your surgery.

Exercise:

For you to get the best outcomes from your treatment, it is advised you practice some basic strengthening and stretching exercises prior to your surgery. You can ask to be referred to a physiotherapist who will give you some helpful exercises. Here are some exercises you can try at home:

Exercise 1: Passive knee extension

1. Sit upright on a chair, with another chair facing you
2. Place your leg on the chair opposite, keeping the knee as straight as possible
3. Keep the leg straight and extended for a few minutes with your toes relaxed
4. Slowly take your leg out of position

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Exercise 2: Assisted knee flexion stretch

1. Sit in a chair and bend your affected knee back as far as you can
2. Place the ankle of your good leg over the front of your affected leg and use it to bend your knee back further
3. Hold the position

Exercise 3: Static quads/straight leg raise

1. Lie on your back or sit with your legs out straight in front of you
2. Straighten your affected knee by pressing the knee down and tensing your thigh muscle
3. Hold this position
4. If possible, keep the muscle tense and lift the whole leg just a few centimetres
5. Slowly lower back down
6. Repeat

Lifestyle changes:

We would encourage anyone waiting for surgery to lose some weight if necessary and to stop smoking. Both these measures are known to lower risk of complications following surgery. Visit our [While You Wait website](#) for more information and support.

Mental health support:

It's important during this time to take care of your mind as well as your body. You might be feeling down, worried or anxious while you wait for your surgery. Remember it's okay to feel like this, these are normal reactions. There are a range of services available to help you manage during this time. Take a look at our [mental health support page](#) for more information.

Pain Management:

You can take pain relief such as Paracetamol, Anti-inflammatory creams, Codeine, Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. If you need any advice, your local pharmacy will be able to help.

There are a number of resources to help you manage your pain:

- [10 ways to ease pain](#)
- The Chartered Institute of Physiotherapy has produced helpful [guidance for managing pain and improving your quality of life](#)

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

The information on this page is designed to help you manage your symptoms and stay in the best possible health while you wait. It is however possible that some of your symptoms may get worse while you are waiting for your surgery. There are some things to look out for that would indicate you should seek medical help:

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1. If your pain gets worse to the point that it is unmanageable with the pain relief suggested by the pharmacist or doctor and you are struggling to cope with it;
2. If your mobility gets worse to the point you are off your feet or unable to work;
3. If your knee suddenly deteriorates

If you experience any of these issues we would recommend getting in touch with your hospital team. The number and email should be on your last hospital appointment letter.

Alternatively, you can contact your GP practice. Whilst your GP does not have access to the hospital waiting list to get you seen sooner, if your condition is getting worse they can assess you, give advice and can contact the hospital on your behalf if necessary.

If your condition gets worse but you already have your date for surgery, we recommend getting in touch with your hospital team. The number and email for this should be on the hospital appointment letter.

Links to more information

NHS England advice on managing knee pain - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/knee-pain/>

[NHS England information about knee replacement surgery](#)

[Versus Arthritis advice on managing knee pain](#)