

Frequently Asked Questions

Hip and Knee



Can I get publicly-funded home care after my surgery?

When planning to have an elective surgery, it is important that you think about the home support that you may need and make a plan with your family. Services are also available for a fee. Let your surgeon know well before surgery if you need help to make a support plan. A hospital Social Worker can talk to you about your options.

What if I can't manage at home after my surgery?

The benefit of knowing when you will have surgery is the opportunity to plan ahead. If you don't have the support of family or friends to help you after your surgery, ask your surgeon to connect you with a Social Worker through our Prehabilitation Program. The Social Worker can give you suggestions for fee-for-service homecare providers, respite care facilities (for profit places to stay after your surgery) or other options that you may not have considered.

Can I go to inpatient rehab after my surgery?

Patients typically do not need inpatient rehabilitation after hip or knee surgery and you should plan your home support with the expectation that you will be going home after surgery. It is expected that you will go to an outpatient physiotherapy program for your rehabilitation, meaning that you will leave your house to go to physiotherapy appointments, usually 1-2 times per week starting 7-14 days after your surgery for 3-5 weeks. Your surgeon and the rest of your team will make sure that you have the skills and ability to be safe at home.

My leg is so swollen! Is that normal?

Swelling after surgery is quite normal and can last for several months. Swelling may increase when you increase your activity (e.g. standing or walking for longer than usual). If there is a sudden increase in swelling, not related to activity, you should speak to your physiotherapist or surgeon. To minimize swelling, rest with your leg elevated (on an ottoman when sitting on a chair or with pillows under your ankles when lying in bed) and use ice regularly.

Can I use heat?

We do not recommend placing heat on your surgical leg in the first few weeks after surgery because this can actually increase swelling.

How do I ice my leg?

Begin icing your surgical leg as soon as the bulky dressing is removed. NEVER place the ice directly on your skin. Make sure there is at least one layer of dry cloth or towel

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between the ice and your skin. To make sure your surgical site does not get wet, put the ice in a plastic bag. Leave the ice on for 10-15 minutes at a time. We recommend icing your knee after doing exercises or being active to reduce swelling.

What is the best position to sleep in?

If you have a knee replacement, you must avoid resting or sleeping with your knee bent. To do this, we recommend lying on your back, with your leg straight. If you have to sleep in a recliner chair, put rolled up towels or pillows under your ankles until your knee is straight. If you have a hip surgery, lying on your non-surgical side or on your back is recommended.

How often should I do my home exercises?

More is not always better! Please follow the instructions of the physiotherapist for frequency and number of repetitions or weight. Typically, you should do your exercises 3-4 times a day. While some of your exercises may be uncomfortable while you are doing them, the pain should go back to your baseline once you stop doing the exercise. If you feel heightened pain or have significant increase in swelling for an extended period of time after exercising, you should do less and speak to your physiotherapist at the next appointment.

When can I get back to normal activities after my surgery?

Everybody is different and the activities they “normally” do is different as well! Speak to your physiotherapist if you have specific activities that you want to get back to and together you can develop a plan to reach your goals. Typically, low-impact activities such as walking household distances can be performed immediately after surgery. High impact activities such as jogging, or racquet sports is not recommended.

When can I begin to swim again?

Swimming, is allowed once your incision is completely healed but check with your surgeon for any restrictions.

How long will I need a walker?

A walker allows you to maintain an even walking pattern after surgery and moving too quickly to a cane or no gait aid could cause you to limp too much, increasing the risk of hurting your operated leg or your non-operated leg. Your physiotherapist will assess your walking pattern and let you know when it is time to stop using your walker. This could take a few weeks to a month or more, depending on your walking ability before surgery and your progress with physiotherapy.

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How long will I have to follow Hip Precautions?

Some surgeons require that you avoid certain movements or positions after your hip surgery. If this applies to you, your surgeon or physiotherapist will let you know. You will have to follow these precautions anywhere from 6 weeks to 3 months, depending on your surgeon's instructions. Your surgeon will let you know when you can discontinue following your Hip Precautions.

When can I drive?

Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe to drive. You likely won't be able to drive for about 4-6 weeks.

What is Bundled Care?

The Ontario government changed the way that hip and knee replacement surgery is funded. Under the new program, the hospital is given a set amount of money to cover all the expenses related to your surgery. Not all hip and knee replacement surgeries are covered under the "bundled care program" and whether or not it is covered has implications for how your physiotherapy is paid. Your care team will let you know how physiotherapy will be planned for your specific circumstances.

Do I have to pay for my physiotherapy?

For most hip and knee replacement patients, physiotherapy is covered by the hospital as part of the "bundled care program". The hospital pays for the physiotherapy that you need to recover from your surgery and resume normal daily activities. For hip and knee replacement patients that are not part of the "bundled care program", physiotherapy is usually covered by OHIP.

I have a physiotherapy clinic near my house. Will the hospital pay for me to go there?

If you are a patient that is part of the "bundled care program" (the hospital pays for your physiotherapy), before you can go to the clinic of your choice, the hospital has to call the clinic to come to an agreement. If the clinic agrees to the hospital's terms, the hospital will pay for your physiotherapy. If the clinic does not agree, you can choose to pay for the physiotherapy yourself or go to a different clinic that has an agreement with the hospital. You also have the option of coming back to the hospital for your physiotherapy.

For those that are NOT part of the "bundled care program", you can pay out of pocket or through insurance at any physiotherapy clinic that you choose but you do have the option to get your physiotherapy free at the hospital's physiotherapy clinic. You may also be eligible for physiotherapy covered by OHIP at a publicly-funded physiotherapy clinic.

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How long will I have to come to physiotherapy?

The amount of physiotherapy required varies from person to person. Recovery is dependent on many factors such as previous mobility, strength, pain, swelling etc. Most patients attend physiotherapy appointments 1-2 times a week. You and your physiotherapist will set clear, realistic goals that you can achieve in 3-5 weeks. They will also give you a home program and a plan to continue to improve after you are discharged from physiotherapy.

What if my physiotherapy “runs out” and I want more appointments?

The number of physiotherapy appointments you have depends on how quickly you are able to meet the goals that you set with your physiotherapist. The goals should be ones that you can achieve in about 3-5 weeks. A good physiotherapy plan will also include a plan for you to continue to improve on your own once you are discharged from physiotherapy. If you are having trouble reaching your goals and the physiotherapist feels that you are plateauing (not improving over several sessions), s/he will work with you and your surgeon to decide how to proceed. If you have goals that are beyond the normal expectations after hip or knee surgery (e.g. playing a sport), you may decide to pay privately for more physiotherapy after you meet your initial goals.

Why do you recommend coming back to the hospital for physiotherapy?

Our physiotherapists are highly skilled and experienced and provide excellent patient centered care. They know the surgeons well and understand their expectations and protocols. They are also able to communicate quickly and easily with your surgeon if there are any concerns.

What is Virtual Care and OTN?

Virtual Care is an option that ensures you are able to access the health care services you need from the comfort of your home. Using a computer or tablet, you and your physiotherapist can see and speak to each other through the screen. Virtual Care is a great option if your physiotherapist would like to show you exercises, evaluate your progress or ensure you are doing your prescribed exercises correctly from the comfort of your own home.

Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) allows healthcare workers to provide virtual care services via video conferencing on a secure network that protects your privacy and personal health information.