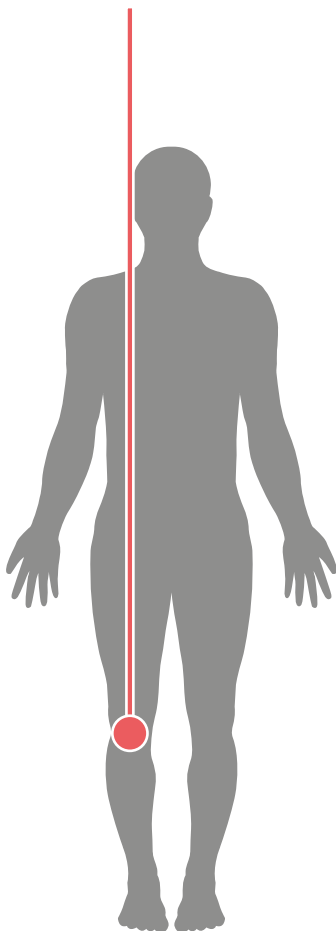


# Get Well Soon

## Helping you to make a speedy recovery after a total knee replacement

### Total knee replacement



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This leaflet is a guide to recovering from a total knee replacement. It does not provide specific medical advice or diagnosis. Nor does it give advice about whether you should consent to an operation. All of these matters depend on individual medical advice from your consultant surgeon based on your own health, medical condition and personal circumstances..

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## Who this leaflet is for

### Print instructions:

To print this document click once on the print icon in your Acrobat Browser, or go to File, then Print on the drop down menu.

To print only one page, select the page number you want in your print menu, usually under 'options' or 'preferences' depending on the printer type.

To save ink, select the 'draft' option.

This leaflet is for anyone who is recovering from, or is about to undergo surgery to have their knee joint replaced with an artificial joint. It should be read in conjunction with any other information you have already been given about your procedure.

The following information is designed to help you make the important decisions about your recovery, such as when you should go back to work, and generally just get back to enjoying life the way you like it. Your surgeon, GP and other healthcare professionals will offer you a lot of very good advice - but ultimately it's you that has to make the decisions.

The advice in this leaflet offers broad guidelines for people who do not have any complications with their surgery, or other specific medical circumstances, such as a long-term condition.

Obviously, every individual has different needs and recovers in different ways – so not all the advice in this leaflet will be suitable for everybody. As always, if you're in any doubt, talk to your surgeon's team or your GP, who will help you to make the right choices for a safe and speedy recovery. Also, if your employer has an Occupational Health service, do use it - they can be an invaluable source of advice in helping you to decide the best way to return to work.

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## What to expect after the operation

### Painkillers

Painkillers may well cause constipation, so it is important to get plenty of fibre in your diet while you are recovering. Fresh fruit and vegetables will help to keep your bowels moving regularly and try to drink plenty of water, but no more than 2 litres a day.

### Scar

You will have a vertical scar on the front of your leg, approximately 10-18cms or 4-7 inches long. The surgeon needs to make a fairly big exposure of your knee joint in order to insert the new implant accurately.

### Stitches

Your wound will be closed using stitches or staples, which will probably need to be removed after 10-12 days, unless they are the sort which dissolve. Your surgeon will advise you about this.

### Dressings

You will have a large dressing on your knee to protect the wound. You may also have one or two tubes connected to drains in your knee to prevent excess blood from accumulating as the body heals. The tubes will normally be removed after a couple of days.

### Rehabilitation

After your operation you will be working with a physiotherapist, who will monitor your specific needs and help you to regain strength and movement. It's particularly important that you stick to the exercises the physiotherapist gives you in order to keep your new knee moving and to prevent it from developing problems.

### Discomfort

The initial pain of surgery needs to be addressed with fairly strong painkillers for the first few days. You should expect to need to take painkilling tablets for up to 12 weeks after your operation. Your surgical team should be able to provide you with a leaflet about pain management.

### Tiredness and feeling emotional

Your body is using a lot of energy to heal itself, so you will feel more tired than normal - sometimes it can come upon you suddenly. If you feel upset or emotional in the days and weeks after your operation, don't worry - this is a perfectly normal reaction which many people experience, particularly when your blood haemoglobin level may be a little lower than normal in the post-operative period.

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## Things that will help you recover more quickly

If you live alone, and you do not have family or friends close by, organise support in advance - have family or friends come to stay with you for the first few days after surgery if possible.

### **Eat healthily**

Eating a healthy diet will help to ensure that your body has all the nutrients it needs to heal. You also need plenty of calories, so now is not the time to try to lose weight! Eat regular meals and keep up your sugar and carbohydrate intake.

### **Stop smoking**

By not smoking - even if it's just for the time that you're recovering - you immediately start to improve your circulation and your breathing - not to mention a whole list of other benefits to the heart and lungs.

### **Family and friends**

Family and friends can give you two important things:

- Practical help with the tasks you might be temporarily unable to do while you recover - such as driving, the weekly shop, or lifting heavier items. However it is entirely possible to do this on your own provided you plan ahead with regard to household requirements such as food.
- Keeping your spirits up - the novelty soon wears off being home alone all day, and it's easy to feel isolated by this. Having company can help you to worry less. It's important not to let anxiety set in, as it can become a problem in itself which stands in the way of you getting back to your normal routine. Keep a routine.

### **Keep a routine**

Get up at your normal time in the morning, get dressed and move about the house. If you get tired, you can rest later.

### **Build up gradually**

Have a go at doing some of the things you'd normally do, but build up gradually. Some suggestions are included in the recovery tracker. Obviously, everyone recovers at a different speed, so not all of the suggestions will be suitable for everybody.

When you're building up your activities, you may feel more tired than normal. If so, stop, and rest until your strength returns. A certain amount of pain in your new knee is quite normal. If you are worried contact your surgeon's team.

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## Returning to work

You do not need your GP's permission to go back to work – this is ultimately your decision.

### **Fact: Work can be part of your recovery**

Everyone needs time off to recover after an operation - but too much of it can stand in the way of you getting back to normal. In fact, by staying off for too long, people can become isolated and depressed. Getting back to your normal work routine sooner rather than later can actually help you to recover more quickly.

### **Getting back to work**

How quickly you can return to work depends on a number of things:

- How you heal
- How you respond to surgery
- The type of job you do

People whose work involves a lot of heavy lifting, or standing up or walking for long periods of time, will not be able to return to work as quickly as those who have office jobs which are less demanding physically.

### **How soon can I go back to work depends on you:**

- Regaining the strength and mobility in your leg to be able to use public transport, or drive to get to work
- Being able to function adequately when you are there and to be sufficiently agile, for example to be able to use escape routes in an emergency.
- Not needing to use strong painkillers which may cause drowsiness.

Every person recovers differently and has different circumstances. If you have a desk job, it's usually safe to return to work around 8 weeks after your knee replacement. If your job is more physically active, you may need to take longer off work – even as much as 12 weeks. You may decide to make a phased return to work.

If your employer has an occupational health nurse or doctor they will advise you on this. Alternatively your GP can give you advice. Ultimately, it's your decision when you want to go back, and there's no insurance risk to your employer if you choose to do so.

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## Planning for your return

### 3 golden rules for a speedy recovery:

Stay active.

Keep a normal daily routine.

Keep social contact with people.

Talk to your Occupational Health service or GP to work out when and how is best for you to return to work.

Depending on the nature of your job, you might want to ask your employer about returning to work on lighter duties at first. This means:

- Spending more time sitting rather than standing or walking
- Doing work that is mostly paperwork, using a computer or telephone
- Not carrying more than around 5kg any significant distance
- Avoiding tasks such as prolonged loading or unloading, packing or unpacking.

If you have an HR department at work, they will be able to advise you on how your absence might affect any benefits you may be receiving during your time off.

Depending on the type of work you do, people who've had a knee replacement sometimes find that in the long term, they need to be redeployed into a role which is less strenuous if they do particularly heavy work. If you think this is the case, talk to your workplace Occupational Health Service in the first instance, or your GP.

### Fact:

It will take you a little while to regain your full confidence when you go back to work. You may be slower than normal at first, so don't take on too much responsibility too soon. Don't be too hard on yourself about this - it's perfectly normal and you'll start to get back up to speed after a few days.

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## Driving

Ultimately, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are in control of the vehicle at all times and to feel confident that you would be able to demonstrate this if asked.

Your insurance company should be informed about your operation. Some companies will not insure drivers for a number of weeks after surgery, so it's important to check what your policy says.


### **Driving - an exercise**

Before resuming driving, you should be free from the sedative effects of any painkillers you may be taking. You should be comfortable in the driving position and able to safely control your car, including freely performing an emergency stop. After 6 weeks, you might want to test your fitness to drive, though discuss this with your physiotherapist first. Do this in a safe place without putting the key in the ignition. Simply sit in the driving seat and practise putting your feet down on the pedals. Again, build up gradually. If you feel pain, stop immediately. If you feel sore afterwards, you may need to wait a day or two and try again. Only when you can put enough pressure on the pedals to do an emergency stop - without feeling any reluctance or inhibition - should you think about driving again.

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## Recovery tracker

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
1-2 days	Your knee may be sore in the first days following the operation, and you will be given strong painkillers to keep you comfortable. You will have a dressing on your knee to protect the wound. You may have drainage tubes attached to your leg to prevent excess blood from accumulating.	The day after your operation, the physiotherapists will get you up and walking with support, as well as bending your new knee.		No

Exercising your 'new knee' is important to make the final result as good as possible. It is important to maintain every day activity. You may also want to follow the exercises given to you by your physiotherapist.

There are no set rules or times about when it's safe to do so other than whether it feels OK to you - treat it like any other physical activity and build up gradually.

### specific print instructions:





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## Recovery tracker

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
3–7 days	You will still feel pain in your leg. You will be gaining strength in your leg each day, though you will still need a walking frame or crutches.	You will be in hospital for at least 5 days - and possibly up to 10 days - after your operation. During this time, you will be helped with a series of exercises to continue to build up the strength and the range of movement in your leg. Regular painkillers will be prescribed.		No
7–14 days	You'll feel a little stronger each day as you do the exercises with the physiotherapist. You will still feel pain in your leg. Any stitches will be removed at some point in the second week after the operation and the dressings will be removed.	Your surgeon and physiotherapist will assess when you're safe to go home, depending on your progress and how much support you'll need at home (both in terms of equipment and personal help).		No
2–6 weeks	You will be back at home by this point, but you will still need to take regular painkilling tablets and it is quite normal to feel some pain. Your leg will still be weak, though improving.	Continue to take the advice of the specialist and build-up your activities gradually. It's useful to do the exercises at least 3-4 times per day.	 	No

Remember, take a step-by-step approach to getting better, and build up your activities in small stages. Don't push yourself too far too fast. If you're concerned about anything, or if you feel you're not making progress fast enough, ask your surgeon or GP.



### When can I have sex?

For many people, being able to have sex again is an important milestone in their recovery. There are no set rules or times about when it's safe to do so other than whether it feels OK to you - treat it like any other physical activity and build up gradually.

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## Recovery tracker

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
6–8 weeks	<p>Bear in mind that you may not be able to get to work without using public transport, as this may entail walking quite a long way and climbing on and off buses and trains.</p> <p>You are likely to still feel some pain in your leg, though this will be improving.</p>	<p>You should have no difficulty with activities like walking, cycling or swimming. Activities that have a high impact on the knee - such as running or heavy lifting - should be avoided.</p>		<b>Yes</b>
12 weeks	<p>By now, most people can safely return to work. If your job is so strenuous that it is not suitable for your “new knee”, you may want to talk to your employer about being assigned temporarily to a new role with lighter duties. It’s worth talking to your employer about lighter duties you can do without compromising your new knee. Ask your Occupational Health department for advice on returning to work and lighter duties. If you do not have one, ask your GP and surgeon what they would consider to be a safe amount for you to do. You may also decide to make a phased return to work.</p>	<p>Any surgery on your legs means you should be careful about flying, as there will be an increased risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). If you are planning a foreign holiday, it’s best not to fly for at least 12 weeks after this operation. Wearing flight socks is essential.</p> <p>If you’re still signed-off after 14 weeks, it’s possible that you’re feeling anxious about returning to work and could do with a bit of help from your GP and your employer. If you’re off for too long, there’s a risk of developing problems to do with anxiety, isolation, and lack of confidence. These could affect your quality of life in the long term.</p>		<b>Yes</b>

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## After you get home

Day	Got up at ... am	Activities (eg walked for ... minutes)	How much rest I needed after each	What times I needed to rest:	Went to bed at ... pm	How's your knee feeling? Any pain? Emotional feelings?	How much were you able to move your knee today?
1							
2							

Keeping a track of what you've achieved each day will help you to stay positive and get back to enjoying your normal life more quickly.

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## After you get home

Day	Got up at ... am	Activities (eg walked for ... minutes)	How much rest I needed after each	What times I needed to rest:	Went to bed at ... pm	How's your knee feeling? Any pain? Emotional feelings?	How much were you able to move your knee today?
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							

Remember, take a step-by-step approach to getting better, and build up your activities in small stages. Don't push yourself too far too fast. If you're concerned about anything, or if you feel you're not making progress fast enough, ask your surgeon or call your GP.

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## After you get home

Day	Got up at ... am	Activities (eg walked for ... minutes)	How much rest I needed after each	What times I needed to rest:	Went to bed at ... pm	How's your knee feeling? Any pain? Emotional feelings?	How much were you able to move your knee today?
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							

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## Keeping well

Because of your operation, the chances are you'll be a lot more aware of your body and how it works.

Right now is a really good time to build on the knowledge you've gained and make small changes to your lifestyle which can prevent you from experiencing certain health problems in the future. You can do this by:

- Improving your diet - get 5 portions of fresh fruit and veg per day
- Any exercise - even if it's just a few short walks each day - really will make a difference to your health.
- Quit smoking - NHS Stop Smoking Services are one of the most effective ways to stop for good - and they're completely free. Your doctor will be happy to help you.

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## Website links

The internet's a great thing – anything you want to know is there for you at the click of a mouse but, do be careful about the way you use it when it comes to getting information about your health. It's hard to know which sites to trust, and none of them can tell you anything that's specific to your individual medical needs.

If you do want to know more about your operation, recovery or return to work, here is a list of trusted websites that offer safe, sensible, useful information:

**The Royal College of Surgeons of England**  
<http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/>

**British Orthopaedic Association**  
<http://www.boa.ac.uk/>

**British Association of Surgery of the Knee**  
<http://www.baskonline.com/>

**BoneSmart**  
<http://bonesmart.org/>

**NHS Stop Smoking Service**  
<http://smokefree.nhs.uk/>

**NHS Choices**  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/Homepage.aspx>

**Department for Work and Pensions**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>

**GOV.UK**  
<https://www.gov.uk/>

**DVLA - Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency**  
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/driving/disability-health-condition>

Call 111 for nonemergency medical advice