

Leaving the hospital after total knee arthroplasty surgery

How to take care of yourself when you get home



Pain, swelling and discomfort

- Keep your leg elevated when not using it to reduce swelling. You may lower your leg to move from one place to another, but this may cause your leg to throb and swelling to increase.
- For pain and swelling, apply ice for 20 minutes at a time. Take 20-minute breaks in-between.
- You can use heat after the swelling is completely gone.



Medication

- Start tapering pain medication as soon as possible after you leave the hospital to avoid health risks. Most patients are on pain medication for 1-2 weeks after surgery. If you need a medication refill please request it 2 days before you need it.
- Take over the counter or prescribed laxatives while using opioid medication. Tell your doctor if you have any medication allergies.
- If you are taking high doses of opioids you will be prescribed Narcan to use in case of an overdose. Keep it with you at all times.
- You will take blood thinners for up to 6 weeks after surgery.




Wound and dressing care

- It is OK to shower right after your surgery, but keep your dressing clean and dry. After 7 days, you may remove your dressing if your incision is no longer draining. If it's draining, cover it with clean, dry gauze.
- NO soaking or swimming until at least 6 weeks after surgery.


OHSU Total Joint Orthopedic Clinic

Weekdays, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

 503-418-8889

www.ohsu.edu/ortho

For urgent needs after hours, weekends and holidays:

 503-494-8311

Ask for the orthopaedic resident on-call

Tip: MyChart messages

If you have a question that can wait 2 weekdays for a response, try sending a MyChart message to your doctor. You can even attach a photo to the message.

- Avoid creams or ointments on your incision until your doctor says it's OK.
- Expect bruising and swelling in the knee and down to the foot. Swelling can take months to go away. For questions about swelling or bruising call us at 503-418-8889 or update us on MyChart.
- Zip line and/or steri-strips can stay on for up to 6 weeks but can be taken off after 2-3 weeks if there is no drainage and the incision is healing well.
- Pain Pump/Nerve Block: You likely received a regional anesthesia (also called a nerve block or home pump). It causes the operative leg to be numb for 1-4 days to reduce your discomfort. However, as the anesthetic begins to wear off, you are encouraged to take your pain medication as prescribed. If you believe that your pain pump is not working correctly call 503-494-8311 and ask for the Home Pump Physician On-Call.



When to call the doctor

Call our office or the on-call doctor right away if you have any of these:

- Fever greater than 100.4°F
- Chills
- Shortness of breath
- Extreme redness or swelling of surgical cuts (incisions)
- Yellow or white pus-like fluid draining from your surgical cuts
- Bleeding that soaks through your dressings and that you cannot control by applying firm pressure
- Pain in the back of your calf or swelling in your leg that does not go away with elevation
- Pain that does not get better with your prescribed medications



Activity

- Your weight-bearing and range of motion status will be given to you at the hospital. It is OK to gradually increase daily activity.
- It is best to walk several times every day but plan to rest between each walk.
- When you can return to work depends on the type of work you do. Ask your surgeon if you have any work restrictions.
- You can drive once you are fully weight-bearing, no longer immobilized, no longer taking opioids, and can stop the car in an emergency without feeling pain.
- If you are homebound after your surgery you may receive physical therapy in your home. The purpose of this therapy is to work on gait and balance. Physical therapy usually starts about 4 days after your surgery.
- You will have your first appointment with our office 2-3 weeks after your surgery. If you have non-absorbable sutures they will be removed then.