

The “Blahs” After Joint Replacement Surgery

From 4–14 weeks after surgery, you may experience fatigue, irritability, exhaustion, pain, weakness, and feel generally “worn out.” Why?

Your body is recovering from a major surgery. That recovery process uses energy 24 hours a day to heal your body, especially in the first three months after surgery.

Because of this, you may feel like you are getting worse or that something is medically wrong. Neither of these are likely true.

Why I Tell Patients About This

There are three main reasons:

1. These feelings are a normal, but not a pleasant response to major surgery.
2. Because they are a normal response, you do not usually need to see a doctor for them. Many patients have gone to the doctor for these symptoms between 4 and 14 weeks after surgery. They don’t link them to recovery, but they are from surgery and can last for up to 3–4 months.
3. Your next appointment is at 6 months. Some patients come in early at three months due to symptoms and because of the feeling that “this is taking too long so, there must be something wrong.” This is rarely the case, as most major complications occur within the first 6 weeks and very few problems occur between 6 weeks and 6 months.

Patients often wonder at the 3-month unscheduled visit: “Why am I taking longer to recover, having more pain, feeling more limited in my activity than my friend who had the exact same surgery?” or “Why is this different than my other surgery?”

Again, the best analogy Dr. Swank has is pregnancy. No two pregnancies are the same. No two recoveries from surgery are the same. This is especially noticeable in the first three months after surgery. It’s like morning sickness: sometimes it’s better, sometimes it’s worse. It’s not pleasant, but it gets better around 3–4 months.

Telling you about this does not make you feel any better, but at least you don’t have to worry that anything bad is going on. It’s just the recovery process—and it takes longer than any of us would like.

