

Pain and Activity After Joint Replacement Surgery

Returning to Activity

At 6 weeks post-surgery, you will be cleared for full activity without restrictions. However, your muscles may only be at 25% of their normal strength, which can limit what you're able to do comfortably.

The 25% Rule

Use this guideline to safely increase activity:

- If you normally walk 1 hour/day, start with 15 minutes and increase gradually based on how your body responds.
- If you typically use 100 lbs on a leg weight machine, begin with 25 lbs.

What If You Overdo It?

Example: You play 2 hours of pickleball or dance all night at a wedding. The next day, your joint is swollen and painful.

What to do:

- Take anti-inflammatories
- Apply ice and elevate your leg
- Do a gentle activity like walking

You won't damage your implant, but your muscles may be sore, so moderate activity is key.

Understanding Pain During Activity

There are three types of pain to monitor:

1. Pain the Next Day After Overdoing It

- This is normal
- Reduce activity until pain/swelling improves

2. Pain at the Start of Activity

- Joint feels stiff/painful at first, but improves after a few minutes
- This is acceptable and expected

3. Pain That Worsens During Activity

- Pain starts mild, then intensifies and doesn't go away
- This is not okay
- Stop or reduce intensity
- Use ice and anti-inflammatories

How Long Will Pain Last During Strengthening?

You may experience pain and/or swelling for 6 months to a year or longer as muscles strengthen. This is a normal response to exercising with a replaced joint.

Why Is My Recovery Different Than Others'?

Recovery varies from person to person—even with the same procedure.

Analogy:

Just like no two pregnancies are the same, no two surgeries are identical in recovery. Your body may respond differently than someone else's, or even differently than it did in a previous surgery.

