

Secret to Optimal Recovery After Joint Replacement Surgery Is Pre-Surgical Planning



Jennifer Miller

The numbers are staggering. It is projected that by 2023, 4 million total joint replacements will be performed annually nationwide. Taking the appropriate steps before and after elective joint replacement surgery will optimize recovery and decrease stress and anxiety.

One step patients can take to maximize their recovery is to stop smoking before surgery. Smoking inhibits the healing process, and being smoke-free a minimum of six weeks prior to surgery will decrease the risk of complications. Additionally, even moderate amounts of alcohol can weaken the immune system, slow recovery, and can lead to surgical complications and bleeding. Refraining from alcohol use for 2 weeks prior to elective surgery is strongly recommended to decrease these risks, as well as the potential for alcohol withdrawal symptoms following surgery.

“Do your best to maintain a healthy weight,” advises Jennifer Miller, RN, Total Joint Coordinator at NCH. “Pre and post-surgery, follow a diet that ensures you get the right balance of proteins and vegetables; a good balance of

nutrients and controlled blood sugar levels aid the healing process and decreases complications,” she adds.

Take care of dental issues before joint replacement surgery; bacteria from dental problems can enter the blood stream, leading to prosthetic joint infections. It is important to communicate about your new prosthetic joint to your dentist, as antibiotics will generally be required prior to any future dental procedures.

Miller teaches a two-hour pre-surgery class that patients should attend before their surgery date. In the class, patients learn about preparations for surgery, expectations about the hospital stay and discharge information.

“Before surgery, stay as active as you can without causing more discomfort to your joints,” advises Miller. “Upper body strength will also be important as all patients will use a walker after surgery and doing normal movements like getting in and out of bed may take more strength than usual. And, keeping a positive mind-set and focus will aid in the healing process.”



According to NCH physical therapist Sara Baldwin, patients should increase walking, do exercises in the pool, ride a bicycle, or perform physical exercises at a facility with a trainer or at home to increase endurance and flexibility before joint replacement surgery.

Baldwin says that after surgery, pain medication will be prescribed and should be taken before post-surgery physical therapy visits. For swelling that may last up to six months, cold therapy using ice is effective, she explains.

Suzanne Graziano, Nursing Director of Medical-Surgical Units at NCH Downtown Baker Hospital says it's important to prepare your home environment too.

“We will provide outstanding care while you are at NCH, but you need to plan for your first few days at home. Once you are discharged, have a support system in place - someone who is a phone call away or who can stay with you the first couple of days,” Graziano advises.

“Prepare and freeze meals, stock up on nutritious, quick foods or use a food shopping service. Install a safety grab bar and a shower stool and use a raised commode if needed. Remove throw rugs when possible, and clear your living area of obstacles.”

How to optimize recovery after joint replacement surgery

Before surgery:

- Avoid smoking and alcohol use
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat nutritious and balanced meals
- Attend the pre-surgery class
- Increase walking, do water exercises, ride a bicycle
- Prepare quick and easy meals to freeze
- Clear your home of obstacles
- Install safety devices in shower and bathroom

After surgery:

- Have a support system ready after discharge
- Use ice as directed to reduce swelling
- Follow the prescribed physical therapy plan
- Take prescribed pain medication, especially before physical therapy visits
- Keep a positive outlook

For more information, contact Jennifer Miller, NCH Total Joint Coordinator at (239) 624-3998 or email Jennifer.Miller3@nchmd.org