



# NH

## Understanding total joint replacement

### 6 questions you need to ask, and the answers you need to know

This guide provides an overview of total joint replacement surgery and what to expect before, during and after the procedure. If you're considering a total joint replacement, we're here to provide information and expertise to guide you every step of the way.

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HEALTH



## Guiding you on the journey to joint replacement



Total joint replacement is an orthopedic surgical procedure in which parts of a damaged or arthritic joint are removed and replaced with a metal, plastic or ceramic device. The replacement device is called a prosthesis and is designed to replicate the movement of a normal, healthy joint. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), hip and knee replacements are the most commonly performed joint replacements.

As you consider total joint replacement, here are six important questions and answers to help you make an informed decision.

### 1 Am I candidate for total joint replacement?

If you have a joint condition that requires orthopedic surgery, it's important to talk to your doctor about the full range of options available to you. Your doctor may recommend a total joint replacement for a number of different reasons based on your specific condition and treatment goals. According to the AAOS, people who benefit from joint replacement surgery typically experience:

- Pain that limits everyday activities, such as walking or bending
- Stiffness that limits the ability to move or lift the leg
- Pain that continues while resting, either day or night
- Chronic inflammation and swelling that does not improve with rest or medications
- Knee deformity, such as a bowing in or out of your knee (for those considering knee replacement)
- Failure to substantially improve with other treatments such as anti-inflammatory medications, cortisone injections, lubricating injections, physical therapy or other surgeries



Candidacy for both total hip and total knee replacement surgeries is based on a patient's pain and degree of disability, not age. No absolute age or weight restrictions exist for replacement surgery, according to the AAOS, and most patients who undergo these procedures are between the ages of 50 and 80. However, it's important to note that orthopedic specialists evaluate patients individually based on medical history and the likelihood of a successful surgery.

## 2 How do I prepare for total joint replacement surgery?

If it has been determined that total joint replacement is right for you, the next step is to prepare for surgery. In the weeks leading up to your procedure, your surgical team and primary care doctor will guide you through the process. Your primary care doctor may check your general health, and your orthopedic surgeon may require several tests ranging from blood tests to cardiovascular evaluations, such as an electrocardiogram. These tests help ensure that you are physically ready for surgery.

There are also many things you can do to prepare for surgery:

- **Communicate openly and clearly with your care team leading up to surgery:** Ask any questions and share any concerns you may have along the way; communicate any changes to your health that could impact surgery.
- **Prepare yourself physically for surgery:** Talk to your doctor about the types of exercise you can perform safely to get your body ready for the procedure.
- **Plan ahead for at-home recovery:** Take steps now to manage your first weeks at home by coordinating at-home assistance and securing assistive items, such as a shower bench, handrails or a long-handled grabber/reacher.

## 3 What can I expect from the surgery itself?

During a total joint replacement surgery, the damaged cartilage and bone is removed from your joint and replaced with prosthetic components made of metal, plastic or ceramic. The implanted prosthesis is precisely designed to mimic the shape and movement of a natural joint. For example, in an arthritic hip — which functions like a ball and socket — the damaged ball (the upper end of the femur) is replaced with a metal ball. This prosthetic metal ball is attached to a metal stem that is fitted into the femur. Then a plastic socket is implanted into the pelvis, replacing the damaged socket. In most cases, a total joint replacement takes a few hours to complete.

## 4 Are there potential complications with this surgery?

As with any surgery, there is always the risk of complications. Your doctor and surgical team will advise you on steps you can take to help prevent issues from occurring. The good news is that most complications can be treated successfully. Some common complications of total joint replacement surgery include infection, blood clots, nerve injury and issues with the new prosthesis, such as loosening or dislocation.



## 5 What is the recovery and rehabilitation process like?

Recovery and rehabilitation following joint replacement surgery can be different for each individual. Factors such as surgery type, your age and overall health status can influence how quickly you recover from the surgery, progress through rehabilitation and return to normal, daily activity.

You will experience pain when your anesthesia wears off. This pain is normal as a result of the surgical work performed on your bones and tissues. It is important during this time just after surgery to communicate with your nursing staff and doctor about the pain you feel. There are a variety of things that can be done beyond medication to minimize your pain. It is important to “stay ahead of the pain” so it can stay controlled to keep you free to perform necessary rehabilitation exercises as you heal.



Generally, your doctor will encourage you to use your new prosthetic joint shortly after your procedure. Though it may be challenging at first, or even throughout your recovery, it's important to follow your doctor's instructions to help ensure a smooth and successful recovery period.

During the rehabilitation process, most patients experience some temporary pain in the replaced joint because the surrounding muscles are weak from inactivity. This means the body is adjusting to the new joint, and the tissues are healing. In most cases, this pain resolves in a few months.

Exercise and physical activity are important parts of recovery and rehabilitation. Your care team will provide you with specific exercises that will help restore movement and strengthen the joint.

## 6 What results can I expect long term?

Following a total joint replacement, most patients are able to perform daily activities more easily. The results of the procedure typically last for many years, providing improved quality of life that is characterized by less pain and improved strength and motion.

## We can help

If you're considering total joint replacement surgery, the experts at Novant Health Orthopedics & Sports Medicine are here for you. We're nationally recognized for orthopedic excellence, which means you'll receive care you can trust and outcomes you deserve.

### Interested in taking the next step on your journey to joint replacement?

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