

How long does it take to recover from total hip replacement surgery?

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Most patients undergoing total hip replacement surgery want to know when they'll be able to return to their normal life. "Recovery time" is a common question posed to specialists and non-specialists alike.

There are many factors that can contribute to recovery time, but typically patients can return to normal life activities within 1 to 6 months. To be more specific, however, we can examine the difference between "short-term recovery" and "long-term recovery".

Short-term recovery involves the early stages of recovery, such as the ability to get out of the hospital bed and be discharged from the hospital. On days 1 or 2, most total hip replacement patients are given a walker to stabilize them. By the third day after the surgery, most patients can go home. Short-term recovery also involves getting off major pain killers and having a full night's sleep without pills. Once a patient no longer needs walking aids and can walk around the house without pain--in addition to being able to walk two blocks around the house without pain or resting--all of these are considered signs of short-term recovery. The average short-term recovery time for a total hip replacement is 4 to 6 weeks.

Long-term recovery involves the complete healing of surgical wounds and internal soft tissues. When a patient can return to work and the activities of daily living, they are on the way to achieving the full term of recovery. Another indicator is when the patient finally feels normal again. The average long-term recovery for total hip replacement patients is approximately 6 months. Dr. Ian C. Clarke, medical researcher and founder of Peterson Tribology Laboratory for joint replacement at Loma Linda University, writes, "Our surgeons consider that patients have 'recovered' when their current status has improved much beyond their arthritic pre-op pain level and dysfunction."

There are a number of contributing factors that influence recovery time. Josephine Fox, a moderator at the BoneSmart.org hip replacement forums and nurse of over fifty years, says that a positive attitude is everything. Patients should be prepared for hard work, some pain and an expectation that the future is going to be bright. Having access to information about hip replacement surgery and a strong support network is also important to recovery.

Adequate preparation for the recovery period after surgery will increase the chances of a smoother, quicker recovery. Josephine suggests preparing the home for recovery by removing slip mats and items that the patient can trip on. In addition, she recommends organizing medical supplies and aids. If the patient plans to have a person to assist them during the day, it is better to make arrangements ahead of time.

Medical support relating to pain management is also recommended. Josephine writes, "So many patients have phobias about getting addicted to pain meds. They can ruin their recovery by not taking the medication when they should. The impact of pain management on recovery cannot be emphasized enough." Hip replacement patients should know that they can reach out to Pain Control Physicians as well as their orthopedic surgeon for help in pain management.

Physical therapy within the first six weeks is also very important. Most of the exercises for hip replacement patients can be done at home. Patients are encouraged to see physical therapy as an integral part of their recovery and the more serious patients are about their daily exercises, the quicker they tend to return to their normal activities.

Generally speaking, hip replacement patients do recover sooner than knee replacement patients, for example. It should be noted, however, that recovery time for a total hip replacement can differ vastly from patient to patient. Some patients may take 6 months to recover; while others may recover in just 4 weeks.

About Bonesmart.org

BoneSmart.org is a National Public-Awareness Campaign for Candidates of Hip Replacement Surgery and Knee Replacement Surgery. The BoneSmart® National Consumer Awareness Campaign's mission is to raise patient awareness of the options available to persons diagnosed as a hip replacement or knee replacement candidates by providing an Internet portal for awareness of the latest advances in joint replacement materials, their longevity and suitability for various applications. With this information the potential patient may be better informed when discussing options with his or her surgeon.