

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

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Most patients undergoing total knee 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 knee 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 knee replacement is 6 to 12 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 knee replacement patients is between 3 and 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 knee 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 knee replacement surgery and a strong support network is also important to recovery. Josephine writes, "Many small or large issues crop up during recovery, from a pimple near the wound to an unexpected and unusual pain. In these times it is good to have a support group to turn to and get feed back upon an instant. Somebody out there has very likely experienced the same or similar and the 'expert' will have a word as well."

Pain management is essential for recovery in post-operative total knee replacement patients. Range of motion will often determine recovery and therefore it is important to focus on flexion and the extension of the joint. In addition,

Josephine recommends elevation exercises and regular icing. The reliance on pain medication, or lack thereof, can also be an indicator of recovery. Some patients may only take 1 pain pill following their surgery, Dr. Clarke says, while other may have to be weaned off the medication.

Physical therapy within the first six weeks is also very important. Physical therapy improves the motion of the knee and allows for a natural transition back to knee movement in daily activities. Patients who comply with physical therapy exercises tend to recover much faster.

Generally speaking, knee replacement patients take longer to recover than, say, hip replacement patients. It should still be noted, however, that recovery time for a total knee replacement can differ vastly from patient to patient. Some patients may take six months to recover; while others may recover in one month.

About Bonesmart.org

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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.