

How can I manage pain after my total hip replacement surgery?

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Patients about to undergo hip replacement surgery have many questions, and among the most common are those relating to pain management.

Post-operative hip replacement patients want to know whether they will be able to sleep properly on pain medication, how much discomfort they will have with the normal activities of daily life, and how many narcotics or other medications they will have to take. We suggest that you prepare yourself for hip surgery by learning about what the demands on your body after you've had your surgery. Understanding pain management is essential to a healthy recovery.

Oftentimes pain management is a matter of managing your expectations. Keep in mind that surgery on any part of the body, especially the hip and knee, requires a significant period of rest in order for the body to recover its original strength. Do not expect to resume your regular daily activities within a few days after the surgery. Even though the period of post-operative pain for hip replacement surgery is significantly shorter than knee replacement surgery, you will still need to give your hip the time it takes to heal.

In the first week of recovery, rest often and be active only in short spurts. The more rest your body gets during this crucial time, the better. By the 10-day check-up with your doctor, you should feel a major improvement in pain levels. Usually after ten days, the joint pain has gone away and the soft tissue pain is easing. Some patients may use a walking aid up to four weeks after the surgery. At five and six weeks, many patients are returning to activities which were once important to them.

Ice can reduce pain in combination with medication, and with less severe pain, it can be used on its own. For hip replacement patients, we recommend using gel packs and keeping them in the freezer. During your recovery, you'll need to change the ice packs regularly. Please remember to protect your skin--new gel packs can easily burn. Also remember to elevate your legs and rest while you are icing.

Patients are usually sent home with strong pain killers at first. You can get refills for you prescriptions from your surgeon or your primary care physician (but not both). Painkillers may be in the form of tablets or patches but make sure you take them according to the instructions given. Some find it necessary to continue with pain management for up to twelve weeks. This is not unusual and shouldn't be viewed as a weakness. We suggest that if you have pain to take the medication. Depriving yourself will not help your body heal.

If the medication you have been given by your doctor is not effectively treating your pain, you can always talk to your doctor about increasing the dosage, or you may want to consult with your primary physician. Enduring unnecessary amounts of pain after a hip replacement surgery is not recommended simply because swelling occurs which can lead to inflammation and greater pain. At night, you may find yourself more aware of the pain than during the day. This is normal. Again, keep an open communication with your doctor or primary physician about your levels of pain.

Elevating your legs will also help to reduce pain and swelling. By putting your feet higher than your hips, you will be able to offset some of the physical discomfort in your legs. In bed, you can prop your legs up on rolled-up blankets at the end of the bed; in a chair, you can use pillows; on a recliner, you can use pillows. A regular practice of elevating your legs several times a day combined with icing and the proper medication will greatly manage your pain.

Some patients may notice that after the early, sharp pain has subsided, a deeper, more achy pain radiates in the hip

joint. Physical therapy will sometimes exacerbate pain as well, and to treat this, take a dose of medication about an hour before your physical therapy sessions. In the case where you feel a sharp pain out of nowhere, especially a pain you haven't had before, contact your physician. This may occur during your exercises or physical therapy, and it usually indicates an inflammation in one of your muscles or ligaments.

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.