2026

ORTHOPEDIC CARE

DHA

Center of Excellence

Your Guide to Hip or Knee Replacement

Prepare. Recover. Move Forward.

Your joint replacement journey starts before surgery. This guide explains what to expect, how to prepare, and what you can do to support a safe recovery.



Bring this guide with you to appointments and use it to write down questions for your care team.



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WELCOME

Your Joint Replacement Journey

If you are preparing for hip or knee replacement, you probably have questions about what happens before surgery, what surgery day will be like, and what recovery will involve. This guide is here to help.

You're an important member of your healthcare team. Knowing what to expect and taking an active role in your care can help you prepare for surgery and recover safely.

Throughout your journey, your care team will work with you to:

- Prepare your body for surgery.
- Review your medications and health conditions.
- Reduce your risk of infection and other complications.
- Prepare your home for recovery.
- Manage pain and swelling.
- Help you safely begin moving again.
- Recognize when you should contact your care team.

Your care is personal. Your surgeon and care team may give you instructions that are different from the general information in this guide. Always follow the instructions from your care team.

UNDERSTANDING JOINT REPLACEMENT



Why does my joint hurt?
Osteoarthritis is a common reason people need hip or knee replacement. Healthy joints have cartilage that helps the bones move smoothly. Over time, this cartilage can wear down. When that happens, the bones may begin rubbing against each other.

This can cause:

- Pain
- Stiffness
- Swelling
- Reduced movement
- Difficulty walking or climbing stairs
- Difficulty working, exercising, sleeping, or doing everyday activities

When might joint replacement be considered?
Your care team may discuss joint replacement when joint damage is interfering with your daily life and other treatments are no longer providing enough relief.
These treatments may include:

- Medication
- Injections
- Physical therapy
- Exercise or activity changes
- Other nonsurgical treatments

You may also experience grinding, locking, buckling, limping, or difficulty moving safely. The decision to have surgery should be made with your surgeon after discussing your symptoms, health, goals, treatment options, and the possible benefits and risks of surgery.

What can I expect from joint replacement?
Joint replacement can help reduce pain and improve movement and function. Recovery takes time, however. Surgery is only one part of the process. Walking, physical therapy, exercise, home preparation, and following your care team's instructions are all important parts of your recovery.

DECIDING IF JOINT REPLACEMENT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Joint replacement is a personal decision.
Before surgery, talk with your surgeon about your pain, daily activities, overall health, support at home, work or family responsibilities, and what you hope to be able to do after recovery.



Questions to ask your surgeon:

About my surgery

- Why are you recommending joint replacement now?
- Which joint will be replaced?
- Are there other treatment options I should consider?
- What type of implant or surgical approach will you use?

About my risks

- What are my personal risks from surgery?
- What can I do before surgery to lower those risks?
- What signs of infection or other complications should I watch for?

About anesthesia

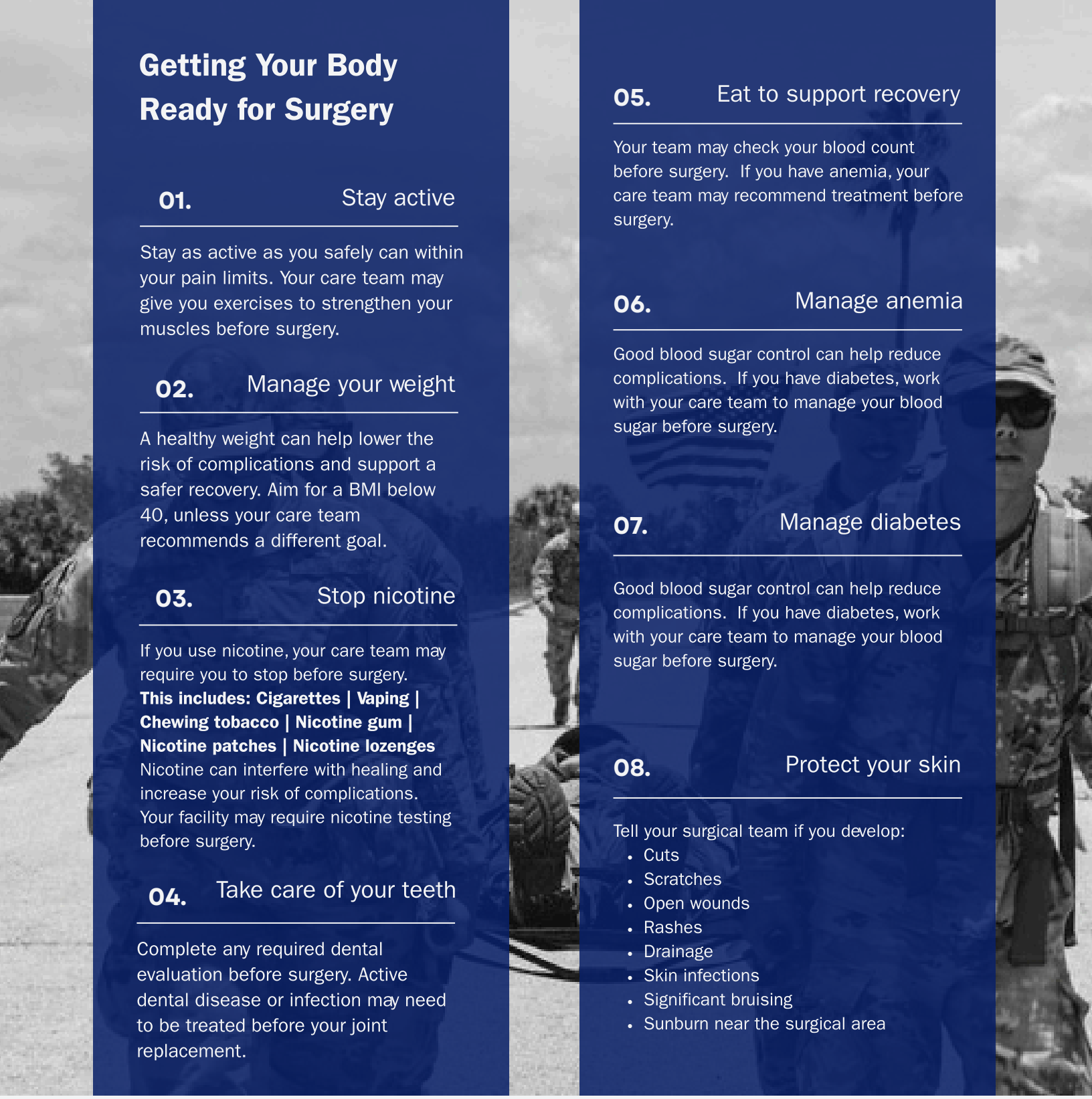
- What type of anesthesia might I receive?
- Is spinal anesthesia an option for me?
- Will I receive a nerve block or other pain control?

About going home

- Could I go home the same day?
- Might I need to stay overnight?
- What help will I need at home?

About recovery

- When will I begin walking?
- When will physical therapy start?
- How long might I need a walker or cane?
- When might I return to work, driving, exercise, or other activities?



Getting Your Body Ready for Surgery

01. Stay active

Stay as active as you safely can within your pain limits. Your care team may give you exercises to strengthen your muscles before surgery.

02. Manage your weight

A healthy weight can help lower the risk of complications and support a safer recovery. Aim for a BMI below 40, unless your care team recommends a different goal.

03. Stop nicotine

If you use nicotine, your care team may require you to stop before surgery.
This includes: Cigarettes | Vaping | Chewing tobacco | Nicotine gum | Nicotine patches | Nicotine lozenges
Nicotine can interfere with healing and increase your risk of complications.
Your facility may require nicotine testing before surgery.

04. Take care of your teeth

Complete any required dental evaluation before surgery. Active dental disease or infection may need to be treated before your joint replacement.

05. Eat to support recovery

Your team may check your blood count before surgery. If you have anemia, your care team may recommend treatment before surgery.

06. Manage anemia

Good blood sugar control can help reduce complications. If you have diabetes, work with your care team to manage your blood sugar before surgery.

07. Manage diabetes

Good blood sugar control can help reduce complications. If you have diabetes, work with your care team to manage your blood sugar before surgery.

08. Protect your skin

Tell your surgical team if you develop:

- Cuts
- Scratches
- Open wounds
- Rashes
- Drainage
- Skin infections
- Significant bruising
- Sunburn near the surgical area

Note: Your surgery may need to be delayed

For your safety, surgery may need to be postponed if you have an active infection or if required medical evaluations, laboratory tests, dental treatment, medication changes, or other preparation steps are not complete.

YOUR SURGERY PREPARATION TIMELINE

Your facility may use slightly different timing. Follow the schedule your care team gives you.



START NOW

- □ Read this guide.
- □ Write down your questions.
- □ Complete any tests ordered by your surgeon.
- □ Stop nicotine if required.
- □ Schedule your joint replacement education class.
- □ Choose a family member, friend, or other trusted adult who can help you during recovery.
- □ Begin preparing your home.
- □ Schedule your dental appointment if required.

ABOUT 30–45 DAYS BEFORE SURGERY

- □ Primary care medical clearance
- □ Health history and physical examination
- □ Blood tests
- □ EKG
- □ Dental clearance
- □ Specialty medical clearance, if needed

Follow the timing provided by your local military medical treatment facility.

ABOUT 4 WEEKS BEFORE SURGERY

- □ Confirm your medical appointments and clearances.
- □ Review your surgery and recovery instructions.
- □ Confirm who will drive you home.
- □ Confirm who will help you during the first several days after surgery.
- □ Begin getting your home ready.

ABOUT 2 WEEKS BEFORE SURGERY

- □ Review every medication and supplement you take with your care team.
- □ Make sure you understand which medications to stop or continue.
- □ Confirm that required medical and dental clearances have been received.
- □ Schedule physical therapy as directed.

ABOUT 1 WEEK BEFORE SURGERY

- □ Get any prescribed skin or nasal preparation products.
- □ Make sure you have your walker and other recommended equipment.
- □ Prepare an updated medication list.
- □ Review your fasting instructions.

1 BUSINESS DAY BEFORE SURGERY

Your surgical team may contact you with your arrival time.

Confirm:

- □ Your arrival location and time.
- □ Your ride to and from the hospital.
- □ Your care partner.
- □ When to stop eating and drinking.
- □ Which medications you should take the morning of surgery.



MANAGING YOUR MEDICATIONS BEFORE SURGERY

Medication safety is important
Some medications can affect bleeding, blood sugar, anesthesia, or other parts of your surgery.

Don't stop, start, or change a prescription medication on your own.
Your surgeon, anesthesia team, primary care provider, or prescribing specialist will tell you what to do.

Make sure your care team knows about everything you take.

Include:

- Prescription medications
- Over-the-counter medications
- Vitamins
- Herbal products
- Dietary supplements
- Weight-loss medications

Some medications that may require special instructions include:

- Blood thinners
- Aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Diabetes medications and insulin
- GLP-1 or weight-loss medications
- Immune-modifying medications
- Blood pressure medications
- Herbal or natural supplements

Bring an updated medication list with you on the day of surgery.

For each medication, write down:

- Medication name
- Dose
- How often you take it
- Why you take it
- Whether you were told to stop or continue it
- When you took your last dose

Preventing infection begins before surgery.

Tell your surgical team if you become sick.

Contact your surgical team **if you develop an infection** or begin taking antibiotics before surgery.

Examples include:

- Urinary tract infection
- Skin infection
- Sinus infection
- Dental or mouth infection
- Other infections requiring antibiotics

Your surgery may need to be delayed until the infection has been treated.

Check your skin

Tell your care team about new:

- Cuts
- Scratches
- Rashes
- Open wounds
- Drainage
- Skin infections
- Significant bruising
- Sunburn

Follow your skin preparation instructions

Your facility may ask you to use chlorhexidine gluconate, or CHG, before surgery.

Follow your facility's instructions exactly for when and how to use it.

After using CHG, you may be instructed not to use products such as:

- Lotion
- Powder
- Deodorant
- Makeup
- Perfume
- Cologne

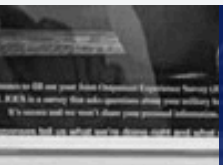
Use prescribed nasal ointment as directed

If your care team prescribes mupirocin or another nasal treatment, use it exactly as instructed.

Your local care team's instructions take priority over general information in this guide.

PREPARE YOUR HOME AND YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Preparing your home before surgery can make your recovery safer and easier.



Choose your care partner

Ask a responsible adult to help you during the first part of your recovery.

Your care partner may help:

- Drive you home.
- Prepare meals.
- Pick up medications.
- Help with errands.
- Keep track of instructions.
- Help you move safely.
- Watch for warning signs.

Your care team will tell you how much help you are likely to need.

Make your home safer

Before surgery:

□ Remove loose rugs.
□ Move cords and clutter out of walkways.
□ Make sure stairs and hallways are clear.
□ Add night lights where needed.
□ Keep the path between your bed and bathroom clear.
□ Place frequently used items where you can reach them easily.
□ Make a plan to keep pets from getting underfoot.

Get your equipment ready

Your care team may recommend:

- Walker
- Cane
- Shower chair
- Raised toilet seat
- Grab bars
- Other assistive equipment

Preventing falls is an important part of your recovery.



THE DAY BEFORE AND DAY OF SURGERY

The night before surgery

Follow your care team's instructions for:

- Eating and drinking
- Medications
- Skin preparation
- Arrival time
- Where to check in

What should I bring?

Bring:

- Government or military ID
- Registration or insurance information, if required
- Updated medication list
- Walker, if instructed
- Loose, comfortable clothing
- Supportive, closed-back shoes
- Glasses or hearing aids
- CPAP machine if you use one and are instructed to bring it
- Phone and charger
- Written questions

Leave these items at home

Do NOT bring:

- Jewelry
- Valuables
- Unnecessary personal items
- Unapproved medicarions or supplements
- Perfume, cologne, makeup, or lotion

Avoid unstable footwear such as flip-flops or loose slippers.

What happens before surgery?

After check-in, you will usually:

1. Change into a hospital gown.
2. Have an IV started.
3. Complete safety checks with your nursing team.
4. Meet your anesthesia team.
5. Meet members of your surgical team.
6. Confirm your procedure and surgical site.
7. Review allergies and medications.
8. Ask any remaining questions.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

After surgery, you will go to a recovery area where your team will closely monitor you.

They will check:

- Your blood pressure and other vital signs.
- Your pain.
- Nausea.
- Your surgical area.
- Your circulation.
- Your ability to move.

You may feel sleepy, cold, nauseated, or uncomfortable when you first wake up. Your care team will help manage these symptoms.

Moving starts early

When it is safe, your team will help you begin moving.

You may:

- Sit up.
- Stand.
- Walk with assistance.
- Practice using your walker.
- Practice getting in and out of a chair or bed.
- Begin exercises.

Early movement helps support recovery and can help reduce complications.

Before you go home

Your care team will make sure you can safely:

- Walk using your recommended assistive device.
- Get in and out of bed or a chair.
- Use the bathroom.
- Manage pain with medications you can take at home.
- Follow your movement precautions.
- Recognize important warning signs.

Your physical therapist and clinical team will help determine when you are ready to leave.

Going home is based on your safety and readiness—not simply how much time has passed since surgery.

What may be normal?

During early recovery, you may experience:

- Pain or soreness
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Stiffness
- Increased soreness after activity or physical therapy

These symptoms should generally improve as you recover.

Managing pain and swelling

Follow your care team's instructions.

You may be told to:

- Elevate your surgical leg.
- Use ice for short periods.
- Protect your skin from direct contact with ice.
- Take medications on schedule.
- Change positions regularly.
- Walk regularly while awake.

Caring for your incision

Follow the wound-care instructions provided when you leave the hospital.

In general:

- Keep your dressing clean and dry for as long as instructed.
- Don’t soak your incision in a bath, pool, or hot tub until cleared.
- Don’t put lotions, creams, powders, or ointments on your incision unless your care team tells you to.

Returning to normal activities

Gradually return to daily activities as you recover.

Talk with your care team about when it is safe to return to:

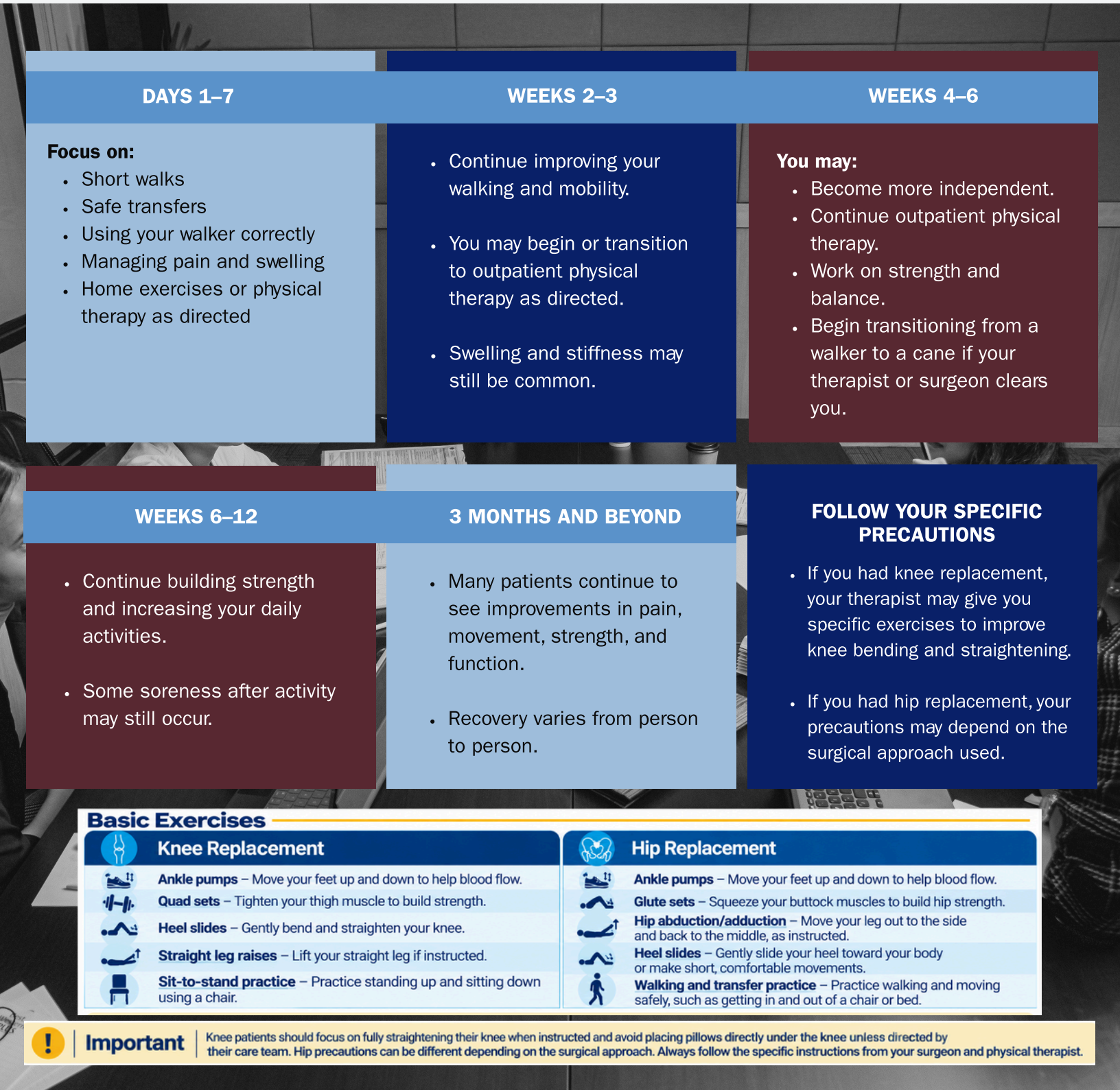
- Work
- Driving
  - Don’t drive while taking opioid pain medication.
  - Don’t return to driving until your surgeon clears you and you can safely control the vehicle.
- Exercise
- Sports
- Travel
- Sexual activity
- Other activities that are important to you

PHYSICAL THERAPY AND GETTING MOVING AGAIN

Movement is a major part of your treatment.

DAY OF SURGERY

- Stand and walk with help when it is safe.
- Begin pain control, blood clot prevention, and physical therapy.



DAYS 1–7

Focus on:

- Short walks
- Safe transfers
- Using your walker correctly
- Managing pain and swelling
- Home exercises or physical therapy as directed

WEEKS 2–3

- Continue improving your walking and mobility.
- You may begin or transition to outpatient physical therapy as directed.
- Swelling and stiffness may still be common.

WEEKS 4–6

You may:

- Become more independent.
- Continue outpatient physical therapy.
- Work on strength and balance.
- Begin transitioning from a walker to a cane if your therapist or surgeon clears you.

WEEKS 6–12

- Continue building strength and increasing your daily activities.
- Some soreness after activity may still occur.

3 MONTHS AND BEYOND

- Many patients continue to see improvements in pain, movement, strength, and function.
- Recovery varies from person to person.

FOLLOW YOUR SPECIFIC PRECAUTIONS

- If you had knee replacement, your therapist may give you specific exercises to improve knee bending and straightening.
- If you had hip replacement, your precautions may depend on the surgical approach used.

Basic Exercises

Knee Replacement

- **Ankle pumps** – Move your feet up and down to help blood flow.
- **Quad sets** – Tighten your thigh muscle to build strength.
- **Heel slides** – Gently bend and straighten your knee.
- **Straight leg raises** – Lift your straight leg if instructed.
- **Sit-to-stand practice** – Practice standing up and sitting down using a chair.

Hip Replacement

- **Ankle pumps** – Move your feet up and down to help blood flow.
- **Glute sets** – Squeeze your buttock muscles to build hip strength.
- **Hip abduction/adduction** – Move your leg out to the side and back to the middle, as instructed.
- **Heel slides** – Gently slide your heel toward your body or make short, comfortable movements.
- **Walking and transfer practice** – Practice walking and moving safely, such as getting in and out of a chair or bed.

Important | Knee patients should focus on fully straightening their knee when instructed and avoid placing pillows directly under the knee unless directed by their care team. Hip precautions can be different depending on the surgical approach. Always follow the specific instructions from your surgeon and physical therapist.

MEDICATION SAFETY AFTER SURGERY

You may receive several medications to help with recovery.

These may include medications for:

- Pain
- Inflammation
- Blood clot prevention
- Constipation
- Other medical needs

Use your discharge medication list

Your medications may change after surgery. Follow the medication list you receive when you leave the hospital rather than relying on your old medication routine or memory.



Take pain medications only as prescribed.

If you receive an opioid:

- Take only the prescribed amount.
- Don’t drink alcohol while taking it.
- Don’t drive.
- Store it securely.
- Follow your care team's instructions for reducing use as your pain improves.

Blood clot prevention

- Take your prescribed blood clot prevention medication exactly as directed.
- The medication and dose will depend on your individual needs.

Prevent constipation

Some pain medications can cause constipation.
Your care team may recommend:

- A stool softener or other medication
- Drinking fluids
- Eating fiber-rich foods
- Staying active as directed

Keep track of your medications

Consider using:

- A written medication schedule
- Medication checklist
- Pill organizer

This can help prevent missed or double doses.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Knowing when to ask for help is an important part of a safe recovery.

CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Sudden severe weakness
- Fainting

CONTACT YOUR SURGICAL TEAM PROMPTLY IF YOU HAVE:

- Fever above 101°F
- Chills or suddenly feel very ill
- Increasing redness around your incision
- Increasing warmth or swelling
- New or worsening drainage
- Foul-smelling drainage
- Thick or yellow drainage
- Worsening incision pain
- Severe calf pain, redness, warmth, or swelling
- Pain that is not controlled by your medication
- Rapidly worsening pain
- A fall or near fall
- New difficulty walking
- A feeling that your joint is unstable
- A medication reaction
- New confusion
- Severe nausea or vomiting
- Difficulty keeping fluids down

When in doubt, call your care team.

Reporting a problem early can help prevent complications.

MY JOINT REPLACEMENT READINESS CHECKLIST

EDUCATION
- ☐ I attended or scheduled my joint replacement education class.
- ☐ I read this guide.
- ☐ I wrote down my questions.

MEDICAL CARE
- ☐ I completed my required medical clearance.
- ☐ I completed my required blood tests and EKG.
- ☐ I completed any specialty appointments requested by my care team.

DENTAL
- ☐ I completed my dental evaluation or required treatment.

MEDICATIONS
- ☐ My care team reviewed my medications and supplements.
- ☐ I know which medications to stop.
- ☐ I know which medications to continue.
- ☐ I know which medications to take the morning of surgery.

NICOTINE
- ☐ I stopped nicotine as directed.
- ☐ I completed nicotine testing if required.

SKIN AND INFECTION
- ☐ I told my team about any infections or antibiotics.
- ☐ I checked my skin for cuts, rashes, wounds, drainage, or other concerns.

MY HOME
- ☐ I removed trip hazards.
- ☐ I prepared my bathroom.
- ☐ I arranged recommended equipment.
- ☐ I placed frequently used items within easy reach.

MY SUPPORT
- ☐ I chose my care partner.
- ☐ I confirmed who will drive me home.
- ☐ I arranged help for my first days at home.

MY HOSPITAL BAG
- ☐ ID
- ☐ Walker, if instructed
- ☐ Medication list
- ☐ Loose clothing
- ☐ Supportive closed-back shoes
- ☐ CPAP, if instructed
- ☐ Glasses/hearing aids
- ☐ Phone and charger

MY RECOVERY
- ☐ I know my physical therapy plan.
- ☐ I understand my wound-care instructions.
- ☐ I know how to take my medications.
- ☐ I know the warning signs that mean I should call for help.

HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

OUTSIDE MY HOME

□ Entrances are well lit.
□ Steps and sidewalks are clear.
□ Railings are secure where needed.

INSIDE MY HOME

□ Hallways and walkways are clear.
□ Loose rugs and cords are removed or secured.
□ Stairs are free of clutter.
□ Handrails are secure.
□ The path from my bed to the bathroom is clear and well lit.

BATHROOM

□ My shower or tub has a nonslip surface.
□ I have a shower chair if recommended.
□ I have a raised toilet seat if recommended.
□ Grab bars are available if recommended.

KITCHEN

□ Frequently used items are easy to reach without bending or stretching

PETS

□ I have a plan to keep pets from getting underfoot.

EMERGENCY PREPARATION

□ My phone and charger are easy to reach.
□ Important phone numbers are easy to find.
□ My medication list is available.

MY MEDICATION WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet with your care team.
Don’t decide on your own when to stop a medication.

Medication	Dose	Why I Take It	Stop / Continue / Take Morning of Surgery	Last Dose	Provider

DENTAL CLEARANCE

Your surgical team will tell you whether you need dental clearance before your joint replacement.

Patient Name: _____
Date of Birth: _____
Scheduled Surgery Date: _____
Dental Evaluation Date: _____

Dental Provider
I evaluated this patient for active dental disease or infection that may require treatment before joint replacement surgery.

Outstanding treatment required:
□ No
□ Yes

If yes, please explain:
_____
_____
_____

Dentist Name: _____
Signature: _____
Clinic: _____
Phone: _____

Dental care after joint replacement
Ask your orthopedic and dental care teams whether you need antibiotics before future dental cleanings or procedures.

Recommendations may depend on your health history, procedure, and current clinical guidance.

MY CARE TEAM AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Surgery Check-In Location:

_____

Surgery Date: _____

Arrival Time: _____

Surgeon: _____

Physical Therapy:

_____

Physical Therapy Phone:

_____

After-Hours Contact:

_____

Emergency Department Instructions:

_____

Follow-Up Appointment:

_____

My Questions

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

_____





Military Medical Treatment Facility:

_____

Orthopedic Clinic:

_____

Orthopedic Clinic Phone:

_____

Clinic Hours:

_____


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