Getting your home ready after knee replacement

Describe your entrance, your usual chair and your bathroom to the therapist. Together, identify the step or transfer that needs practice before you leave the hospital.

Doctors may recommend knee replacement surgery for patients who experience severe pain, stiffness and limited mobility due to arthritis or other degenerative conditions in their knee or knees. A knee replacement is recommended as a last resort after other treatments like medications, injections or arthroscopic surgery have been attempted.

The Knee Replacement Process

In knee replacement, the surgeon replaces damaged joint surfaces with artificial components attached to the thigh bone and shin bone. The surgical and anesthesia teams explain which approach is suitable and how pain will be managed. Some procedures use a smaller incision. Ask whether that option applies to you and what difference it would make for recovery. If both knees need replacement, surgery may be staged or, for selected patients, performed in one operation. Recovering with both knees affected changes the help you may need to stand, use stairs or get into the bathroom. Discuss those tradeoffs before scheduling.

The Recovery Process

After the surgery, expect a hospital stay of about three to four days. Your doctor will use input from your therapists and case manager to decide if you are able to transition to another care setting for continued rehabilitation at a skilled nursing facility (SNF) or an inpatient rehabilitation facility (IRF); or if you could go home with outpatient or home health care.

Whether you are at a SNF or an IRF, you will work with physical therapists to learn exercises to strengthen the muscles around your knee as well as general strengthening and range of motion exercises to bend and straighten the knee joint. Therapy time in a SNF can vary according to your needs. In an IRF, the minimum therapy requirement is three hours daily.

You must begin immediately working on increasing flexibility and gaining full extension of the knee to help prevent scar tissue from forming internally. Your therapist will also teach you mobility techniques to help you return to independence -- these include bed mobility, sit-to-stand and walking.

Recovery Expectations

Initially, you will probably walk with a walker. As your strength, balance and endurance improve, your therapist will help you decide when you are ready for crutches, a cane or another device. Your therapist will also teach you to walk on uneven surfaces such as ramps, curbs and stairs.

Occupational therapists will assist you with activities of daily living, which may include how to safely get in and out of a shower or tub and how to dress within your initial limitations through the use of adaptive equipment, if needed. They will teach you how to adjust your activities at home while using your walking device when you are doing things like cooking, cleaning and doing laundry. Both occupational and physical therapists will discuss any appropriate home safety instructions or modifications that might be needed. Recommendations may include the following:

- Avoid sitting on low surfaces that are difficult to get up and down from
- Avoid chairs that rock, roll or swivel
- A raised toilet seat may be recommended to help you get up and down from the toilet more easily
- A shower chair and/or grab bar may be recommended for safety in the shower
- Keep walking paths clear and pick up throw rugs
- A rail may be recommended if you have steps to get into your home

Once you leave an inpatient setting, you will likely continue therapy on an outpatient basis. It is very important to continue so the therapists can monitor your strength and range of motion, Driving can normally be resumed about four to six weeks after surgery. You will need to avoid all sports, including jogging, until cleared by your physician. If you complete your rehabilitation program and follow all post-surgery instructions from your physician and therapists, you should be able to resume most of your favorite activities with little to no discomfort.

For questions about a possible stay, call Lakeview Admissions at (262) 534-8509. During a stay, ask the bedside nurse who can help with your question.

This article is informational only and does not constitute medical advice, and is not a substitute for medical or professional care.

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