

# Preparing for Surgery

## ADVICE FOR PATIENTS



When you are waiting to have joint replacement surgery, it can feel like time is passing very slowly, and it can be a time of uncertainty. We have put together this guide with advice intended to help prepare you for the next steps towards surgery.

### While You Wait

**Wait times** will differ around the country and will be dependent on the priority your consultant believes your needs are.

It is important not to feel that all you can do is ‘sit and wait’ for your surgery date. There are still many **self-management techniques** you can do to help ease the pain, aid mobility and ensure you put yourself in the best position for a speedy recovery from surgery.

Eating a healthy diet, losing weight if needed, continuing physiotherapy and any exercises prescribed will all help.

You may feel anxious about the operation and its outcomes, so ensure you have someone who can give both emotional and practical support as you prepare for the journey ahead. If you aren’t sure where to turn, start with your own GP. Many people find reassurance in knowing what is to come and that preparing ahead helps.

During that wait time, keep your GP or surgical team updated on your situation, if your mobility worsens, they may be able to prioritise you for surgery.

## Pre-surgery Preparation

Prior to surgery you will have a pre-operative assessment to check you are fit and well enough to safely undergo the surgery. Even if you don't have a date for your surgery, it pays to understand what will happen and how you can prepare. Sometimes you may be offered a cancellation slot at short notice.

Gather information about what to expect, how long you will be in hospital, who will be conducting the surgery and how experienced they are. If you are not sure about the surgery, it can be useful to ask the surgeon if they would advise a member of their family to have the operation. Ask what you need to bring to the hospital, the visiting hours, when you are likely to be discharged and how you will get home. Some people may wish to know more details than others about what the operation involves, ask as much as you are comfortable with. Don't be afraid to share your concerns with the surgeons, as well as talk about your goals and expectations for post-surgery activities, as this can be taken into account when they give you guidance.

You can prepare questions to ask at your medical appointments, to ensure you maximise the time with your surgeon/consultant and come away feeling informed about the procedure. Taking notes or having someone else with you can help to make sense of all the information you receive.

You will need to think about how you will manage your recovery once you are sent home. Even with willing friends and family around you, professional support can be helpful.

Some tips to help:

- There are many things you can do to prepare your home environment for post-surgery recovery, including cooking and freezing meals and rearranging household items for easier access. Consider what limitations you may have during recovery, for example reaching items stored in high cupboards, and temporarily rearrange the layout to help you navigate and care for yourself with more ease, during your recovery period. It can be useful to have clothes and shoes that are easy to take on and off, or extra-large sizes if you have had shoulder surgery as dressing may be difficult.
- Stock your cupboards and freezer and/or organise online shopping.
- Plan some nice things you can do with your time during the recovery phase, such as books you have been meaning to read, or TV shows you have missed, or a hobby or craft that doesn't require too much moving about.
- Ask for a checklist from your hospital about what you need to bring with you and pack accordingly.
- Buying additional pillows to help with your comfort in bed after surgery can be really useful, for example a V-shaped pillow can be useful after shoulder surgery as it can be difficult to sit up and this will give you a bit of extra height. Similarly, pillows under the knees or hips can help after hip or knee replacement.

## **Surgery Experience and Immediate Post-Operative Care**

Each surgical operation is unique to the individual, so we can only make some general guidelines as to what to expect. It is important to make sure you find out exactly what will happen 'on the day' and what to expect immediately post-operation from your medical team. It is realistic to expect you will need pain medication, and asking for maximum pain relief post-surgery will help you start moving quickly, which will help speed up your recovery.

### **Post-surgery pain relief**

Make sure you ask about the pain management plan for your recovery, and check what pain relief you will be prescribed to take home with you. This is not the time to be stoic because it is vital that you get moving as soon as possible and the right medication will help with this. The more you can work on your exercises, the better your outcome will be. You are very likely to be constipated due to pain medicines so make sure you take regular laxatives even if you think you won't need them at first because you almost certainly will. Make sure that you have clear instructions from the hospital pharmacist about what to take and when. You will have follow up with a number of healthcare professionals to help you gradually return to fitness, and exercises for strengthening. It is important you follow their advice as it is tailored for you uniquely.

### **Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation**

Post-operatively, rehabilitation can be very variable depending on where you live so it is essential to know what to expect and what you can do to help yourself. You may have a single physiotherapy appointment to check progress or significantly more. NICE guidance suggests that after hip or knee replacement, patients should have either physiotherapy or occupational therapy advice on self-directed rehabilitation before they leave hospital. For shoulder replacement surgery, group or individual rehabilitation may be appropriate. Guidance also suggests that patients should have a clear understanding of their rehabilitation goals and to have a point of contact for advice and support, for example a physiotherapist.

For people who have problems managing their daily activities or are not getting on well with rehabilitation by themselves, or who have memory problems, additional individual rehabilitation or group rehabilitation after discharge may be appropriate.

## **Support services and resources**

Services and support will differ from area to area. You may want to contact local council resources, occupational therapy, GP prescribers and from the hospital. Again, this is not the time to try to be independent or 'get by' – utilise all the support services that are available to you as this will make for a smoother recovery process.

There are also often NHS resources, including online systems for post-surgery follow-up and questions with your medical team. Don't be afraid to ask for help from friends and family and don't forget to rest and sleep which will also help you mend.