



## Covenant Joint Replacement Surgery Guide

# Joint replacement surgery: what to expect before, during and after

Is joint pain holding you back from living your best life possible? It can be frustrating trying to cope with the constant pain, especially if it's limiting you from everyday tasks. So if you're tired of living with the discomfort, it's time to put an end to joint pain. There's a reason why thousands of Americans are choosing to get joint replacement surgery.

It's important to first explore non-surgical treatment options, such as medications, injections, using a brace, etc. But if you have tried these solutions and find that they are no longer effective, it may be time to [talk to a doctor about joint replacement surgery](#).

Surgery can seem like an intimidating step. You may be thinking to yourself, "I should wait until the pain is really bad," or "I'm too young/old for surgery," or "It will be too painful and I may never recover." But don't let the myths of joint replacement surgery hold you back. The experts at Covenant HealthCare can help answer your questions.

Our extraordinary team of board-certified surgeons, along with our well-established joint replacement program called JointWorks, has helped over 1,000 individuals each year on their journey to joint replacement surgery. We understand how difficult it can be, which is why we're here to help every step of the way. Whether you're experiencing knee, hip or shoulder pain, knowing the process of joint replacement surgery can help put your worries to rest.

This guide will walk you through what to expect before, during and after surgery, so you can feel more confident about the process, as you decide whether or not joint replacement surgery is right for you.

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# What is joint replacement surgery?

Joint replacement surgery is a surgical procedure that replaces damaged knee, hip and shoulder joints. This involves removing damaged tissue, and replacing it with a type of metal or plastic prosthesis.

This type of surgery is most commonly performed on individuals living with joint pain caused by osteoarthritis. The purpose of joint replacement surgery is to relieve severe joint pain and to restore joint function and mobility.

If you're considering joint replacement surgery, it can be helpful to understand the process. While your procedure may vary slightly depending on the joint and level of damage, here are six common steps you can expect during the joint replacement surgery process.

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## 1. Get in shape before your surgery

To ensure you have the safest, most effective surgical and recovery process, your surgeon will want to make sure you are as medically healthy as possible. Effectively preparing for surgery can significantly improve your outcomes and surgical experience.

There are multiple benefits to exercising and monitoring your health before surgery. Before undergoing surgery, your doctor will most likely recommend that you get in the best shape possible without overworking your joints. The better shape you are in before surgery, the less of a chance there is for complications after surgery. This has also been proven to shorten recovery time.

Strengthening your muscles will make a significant difference in moving around after surgery. Commit to a moderate exercise routine to strengthen your joints and maintain bone strength. AAOS (American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons) recommends that individuals with severe joint pain try range-of-motion exercises, strengthening exercises, aerobic exercises and engaging in everyday physical activity.

In addition, you may be expected to change your diet to be more nutritious and well-balanced. For individuals who are overweight, your doctor may even want to enroll you in a weight loss program. Losing weight can make a big difference, as it will put less stress on your joints after surgery. Plus, [research](#) shows that overall complication rates after surgery more than double in obese people, including an increased risk of infection.

Individuals who smoke may be asked to cut down or quit their smoking habit. Smoking can put patients at a higher risk during joint replacement surgery, as it affects blood circulation, delays healing, slows recovery time and leads to an increased risk of infection.

Also, diabetic patients need to be diligent about monitoring and management of diabetes and blood sugar levels. Poorly managed and elevated blood sugar levels have an increased risk of complications including delayed healing and infection.

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## 2. Meet with your medical team for preoperative tests

Once you've made the decision to have joint replacement surgery, a team of medical professionals will work with you to prepare for the procedure. First, you will undergo a preoperative evaluation. This will help determine whether or not you are a suitable candidate for surgery, as well as identify any potential complications. The evaluation will include a health assessment and looking for potential risks with anesthesia. Preoperative tests are important as they will help to ensure a safe and successful operation.

Following the preoperative screenings, you will work with the medical team for the preadmission tests. This usually takes place a couple of weeks before your surgery. The tests may include a physical exam, a blood test, a coagulation test, a cardiogram, a chest x-ray and urine sample. Your preadmission tests will vary depending on the type of surgery you plan to have and other health conditions.

In addition, you should have a conversation with your doctor about any medications you're currently taking. Depending on the medications, your doctor will work with you to find substitutions or ask you to stop using your medication altogether, if they may interfere with your surgery or recovery process.

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## 3. Prepare for your homecoming

Full recovery after surgery will take several weeks, so it's important to make your transition back home as easy as possible. You can expect to experience a few physical limitations until you are fully recovered. In order to make the process after joint replacement surgery easier, safer and more comfortable, here are a few things you can plan in advance:

- Arrange for someone to drive you home from the hospital after surgery. If possible, have them stay with you for the next several days until you feel confident enough to manage on your own.
- Rearrange your furniture to make it easier for you to maneuver through your house. If your bedroom is upstairs, you may want to consider moving the furniture to the main floor, so you can easily access the things you need.
- To avoid slips and falls, remove any area rugs or cords that you could possibly trip on.
- Place commonly used items, such as phone, dishes and medications at arm level to avoid having to reach up or bend down.
- Get a reaching tool to help pick up items on high shelves or on the floor. This will help you perform daily tasks without having to stretch and bend.
- Apply for a temporary disabled parking permit if you do not already have one. You can find an application at your local Department for Motor Vehicles (DMV) or your doctor's office.
- Before your surgery we will go through your plan of care.
- You will be encouraged to attend the pre-op JointWorks class.

To help ease your transition back home, expect to plan your homecoming beforehand. It will make a significant difference for the weeks of recovery following your joint replacement surgery.

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## 4. Undergo joint replacement surgery

Relax. Everyone gets nervous, but rest assured knowing your orthopaedic team does this every day. On the day of your surgery, you will be given anesthesia. The purpose of anesthesia is to relax your muscles and put you in a temporary sleep to avoid feeling any pain during the operation. Once you are under anesthesia, the surgery will begin.

It's important to keep in mind that your surgical procedure may vary depending on what type of surgery you're getting (knee, hip, shoulder). However, the general process of a joint replacement surgery will require the surgeon to make an incision near the joint. They will then remove the damaged part of the joint from the surface of the bones. The surface is shaped to fit the new artificial joint, which can either be a form of metal and/or plastic. Once the artificial joint is inserted, it will begin to form to the joint, using surrounding muscles and ligaments for support and function.

After surgery, you can expect to go to our orthopaedic unit where you will receive skilled care. Since a key to optimal recovery is early and frequent activity, you can expect to get up out of bed the day of surgery and frequently during your hospital stay. You can expect some pain, but your team will work diligently to help manage this and you will be discharged with pain medication.

The length of stay varies, however typical shoulder surgery may be done outpatient or may require the patient to spend one night; knee and hip surgery usually requires patients to stay 1-2 nights in the hospital.

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## 5. Physical therapy

Physical therapy starts the day of surgery. Early and frequent activity every day is very important. You can expect, for your safety, to be up in your room and hall frequently while in the hospital.

Before being discharged from the hospital, you should be able to:

- Move, stretch and bend your joints comfortably
- Dress and bathe on your own
- Get around with minimal help from assistive devices
- Walk up and down the stairs using a walker or crutches
- Confidently perform exercise activities on your own

Some patients benefit from ongoing formal physical therapy from a member of Covenant Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation. There are many benefits to early and frequent physical activity. Not only does it allow your new joints to heal with proper exercise, but it has also been linked to quicker recovery.

Depending on your surgeon, you may attend a rehabilitation facility or have a physical therapist come to your home. [The Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Department at Covenant HealthCare](#) offers extraordinary [orthopaedic rehabilitation](#), specifically to individuals who need physical therapy following their joint replacement surgery.

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## 6. Experience the results of joint replacement surgery

The results of joint replacement surgery are noteworthy. A [survey](#) found that 90 percent of people who underwent knee replacement surgery responded that they have less pain and believe their overall quality of life has improved. So, you can expect to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle, improved mobility and a better quality of life after reaching full recovery. Four to six weeks after surgery, you will be able to resume your everyday routine, as well as low-impact activities. According to the [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#) (AAOS), these activities include walking, swimming, golfing, biking, yoga and other light aerobic exercises.

Talk to your doctor for specific recommendations on what activities you need to refrain from. The activities that you may or may not participate in may vary depending on your surgery, individual needs and overall health.

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Getting joint replacement surgery can be a big decision. But it doesn't have to be as scary as you think. Knowing what to expect can help put your worries to rest and prepare you for the surgery. If you're one of thousands of individuals who is currently living with severe joint pain, don't wait. Many people who choose to get the procedure wish they had done it earlier. So talk to a doctor to see how you can begin your journey to a pain-free life.

If you don't already have a doctor, contact one of our [board-certified orthopaedic surgeons](#) at Covenant HealthCare or visit the [Covenant Center for Advanced Orthopaedics](#). We'll help decide whether joint replacement surgery is right for you. And if it is, you can expect that we'll be there every step of the way.

Don't let joint pain stop you from living your best life possible. It's time to get back to feeling extraordinary.