

# Pain Management After Hip or Knee Replacement

AAOS PAIN MANAGEMENT RESOURCE CENTER



## What to Expect After Hip or Knee Replacement

Pain, swelling, and stiffness are normal after surgery. Pain usually is worst in the first few days and improves over time. Good pain control helps you move more easily, sleep better, and heal faster. Pain control involves more than medications.

## Your Pain Management Plan

Your plan may include medications, ice, movement, and rest or positioning. Take medications exactly as prescribed and follow your surgeon's instructions.



### Medications

Take exactly as prescribed. Do not wait until pain is severe.



### Ice

Use often to help reduce swelling and pain.



### Movement

Move regularly and do your exercises as instructed.



### Rest

Rest and position your body to support recovery.

## Tips for Better Pain Control

### Use these daily habits to stay comfortable while your body heals.

- Take your medications on schedule; do not wait until pain is severe.
- Use ice often.
- Move regularly; avoid staying in one position too long.
- Do your exercises as instructed.
- Drink fluids and eat healthy foods.

## Always Follow Your Surgeon's Instructions

This information does not replace medical advice. Your surgeon's instructions should guide your recovery plan and medication use.

## Pain Medication Options

Most patients use more than one type of medication to manage pain and lower side effects. You may be prescribed a combination of the following:

Medication Option	Purpose and Notes
<b>Acetaminophen and/or anti-inflammatory medications</b> (eg, ibuprofen or naproxen)	Help reduce mild to moderate pain and swelling. Anti-inflammatory medications often are taken on a regular schedule if approved. Do not use these with prescription NSAIDs unless your surgeon says it is safe.
<b>Opioids</b> (eg, hydrocodone, oxycodone, or tramadol)	Used for severe pain for a short time; may cause nausea, constipation, or drowsiness. Use the lowest dose for the shortest time.
<b>Nonopioid medications</b> (eg, Journavx [suzetrigine])	May be used instead of opioids for moderate to severe pain.
<b>Nerve pain medications</b> (eg, gabapentin, pregabalin)	Help manage nerve-related pain or sharp, shooting sensations.
<b>Muscle relaxants</b> (eg, cyclobenzaprine, carisoprodol, tizanidine, methocarbamol, baclofen)	Help manage muscle spasms.
<b>Certain antidepressants</b> (eg, amitriptyline, nortriptyline, duloxetine, venlafaxine)	May help with long-term or nerve pain.
<b>Anti-nausea medications</b> (eg, ondansetron or promethazine)	Help prevent nausea from opioids.
<b>Stool softeners</b> (eg, docusate sodium or polyethylene glycol)	Help prevent constipation caused by opioids.
<b>Lidocaine patches</b>	May help relieve pain near the incision.

### Medication Safety Principle

Use each medication only as instructed. Never take more than prescribed, and ask your surgeon before combining over-the-counter and prescription medications.

## Medication Safety and Side Effects

### Nonopioid Pain Medications

Take first when instructed. Acetaminophen helps with mild to moderate pain. NSAIDs help reduce

### Opioid Pain Medications

Take only if needed for moderate to severe pain. Use the lowest dose for the shortest time. Side effects may

## Important Safety Reminders

- Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medications.
- Do not drive while taking opioids.
- Never take more than prescribed.
- Keep medications away from children and pets.
- Talk to your surgeon about all medications and supplements.

## Common Side Effects and What to Do

### Constipation

- Drink 6 to 8 cups of water each day.
- Eat high-fiber foods.
- Take stool softeners, if prescribed.

### Nausea

- Take medications with food, if allowed.
- Eat small, simple meals.

### Drowsiness

- Rest as needed.
- Avoid driving.

**Call your surgeon if side effects are severe or do not improve.**

## Alternative Pain Management Strategies

Strategy	How to Use It
<b>Ice</b>	Use several times each day for 15 to 30 minutes. Wrap an ice pack in a thin towel.
<b>Elevation and positioning</b>	Keep your leg raised above your heart. Use pillows for support.
<b>Movement</b>	Move often. Take short walks every 1 to 2 hours, and follow your exercise plan.
<b>Rest and sleep</b>	Pain may affect sleep; this is normal. Rest as needed while continuing gentle activity.

## Trouble Sleeping Because of Pain

Sleep can be uncomfortable early in recovery. These steps may help you rest while protecting your hip or knee.

- Take pain medications before bed as directed.
- Use pillows to support your leg.
- Try sleeping on your back with a pillow under your leg or on your side with a pillow between your legs.
- Keep your room cool, dark, and quiet.
- Avoid caffeine late in the day.

### Safe Sleeping Positions

• AFTER HIP OR KNEE REPLACEMENT •



**On your back**  
with a pillow under your leg



**On your side**  
with a pillow between your legs

### Keep Moving a Little Each Day

Movement should increase gradually and should follow your surgeon's instructions. Avoid high-impact activity until your surgeon says it is safe.

## Postoperative Nutrition and Hydration (0 to 6 Weeks)

Good nutrition and hydration help your body heal faster. They may reduce muscle loss, lower pain, and decrease the risk of problems. Talk with your surgeon or a nutrition expert for a plan that fits your needs, especially before taking supplements.

### Key Steps

- High-protein diet: Eat enough protein (eg, 1.2 to 2.0 g/kg of body weight) to help prevent muscle loss while you are less active.
- Limit processed foods, added sugars, and alcohol because they may increase inflammation and disrupt sleep.
- Hydration: Drink 8 to 10 cups of water each day to support healing.

Nutrient	Examples/Purpose
<b>Protein</b>	Lean meats, fish, eggs, Greek yogurt, tofu, beans, and protein shakes
<b>Vitamin C</b>	Citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers, broccoli; helps tissue healing
<b>Vitamin D and calcium</b>	Support bone health
<b>Zinc</b>	Red meat, nuts, seeds, shellfish; helps with wound healing
<b>Omega-3 fatty acids</b>	Salmon, mackerel, flaxseed, chia seeds; help reduce inflammation

### Sample Daily Food Intake

- Morning: Greek yogurt with berries (high protein and vitamin C).
- Lunch/dinner: Salmon or chicken with leafy greens and beans (protein, omega-3 fatty acids, and fiber).
- Snacks: Nuts, seeds, or protein shakes.

### Plan Ahead

- Prepare 2 weeks of easy meals and snacks before surgery.
- You may not be able to drive for about 2 weeks after surgery.
- If you have questions or concerns, contact your surgeon.

## Activity and Recovery After Hip or Knee Replacement

### After Hip Replacement

#### 0 to 3 Days

- Walk with help.
- Practice getting in/out of bed and a chair.

#### 1 to 2 Weeks

- Walk several times each day.
- Do home exercises.

#### 3+ Weeks

- Keep exercising.
- Build strength and endurance.

### After Knee Replacement

#### 0 to 3 Days

- Walk with help.
- Start gentle bending and straightening.

#### 1 to 2 Weeks

- Walk more.
- Work on bending your knee.

#### 3+ Weeks

- Keep improving strength and movement.
- Stay consistent with exercises.

### Hip Precautions (If Instructed)

- Do not bend past 90°.
- Do not cross your legs.
- Do not twist your leg inward.

### Keep All Physical Therapy Appointments

Physical therapy is key to recovery. It helps reduce pain and improve movement.

### Activity should progress gradually.

Follow the walking, exercise, and movement limits provided by your surgeon and physical therapist.

## When to Call Your Orthopaedic Surgeon

Call your surgeon right away if you have any of the following symptoms. It is better to be cautious during recovery.

### Call Your Care Team

- Fever over 101°F (38.3°C).
- Redness, swelling, or drainage.
- Pain that is getting worse.
- Calf pain or swelling.
- Chest pain or trouble breathing.
- New numbness or weakness.



## Homemade Ice Pack Recipe

### How to Prepare

- Make and freeze four ice packs before surgery.
- Use 1-gallon freezer bags; double bag if needed.
- Add 1 cup of rubbing alcohol and 3 cups of water.
- Add a small amount of food coloring, if desired.
- Remove the air, seal the bag, and freeze for 5 to 6 hours.

### How to Use

- The ice pack will stay soft and flexible.
- Place a thin cloth between the ice pack and your skin.
- Use the ice pack for about 30 minutes at a time.



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