

7 Successful Joint Replacement Tips

- ✓ **Do Physical Therapy** - As a rule of thumb, if you are strong and limber going into surgery, you should come out of surgery strong and limber compared to someone who has not done PT prior to their surgery. There is research to prove that, on average, you will have better outcomes in terms of improved recovery time, less time in the hospital, less cost, improved quality of life, less pain, and better range of motion.
- ✓ **Exercise the other supporting limbs** - Coming out of surgery, you are going to have pain and stiffness. Some people are hesitant to move their joints and certain areas of their body for fear of doing the wrong thing or injuring themselves. Many times, your body will go into a protective mode, which only stiffens the surgical joint as well as the rest of your body. Knowing which movements to do can be helpful in preventing stiffness of your other joints. For instance, if you just had a shoulder replacement, not only will your shoulder joint feel stiff, but the surrounding joint like your neck, spine, shoulder blade, collar bone, and ribs can also get stiff. It is important to use the surrounding joints to help support the shoulder replacement. A simple and safe exercise that you can do is “breathe.” Breathe in for 4 sec, hold for hold for 2 sec, and breathe out for 6 sec. You can extend these times if your lung capacity allows. Just make sure that the exhale is longer than the inhale. This helps to regulate your breathing rate. As you breathe, particularly with your diaphragm (or belly breathing - as some of you may heard about), you are moving your lungs, ribs, thoracic spine, shoulder blade, collar bone, and all the surrounding joints. Instead of being in a protective mode, you are now maintaining mobility of your body which can only help the healing process.
- ✓ **Avoid smoking, sugar, and alcohol** - Living a healthy lifestyle before, during, and after the surgery can help to speed up your healing process. It is important to promote the best healing environment possible. Tissues in your body heal about the same way regardless of whether you have had a surgery or get a paper cut. For instance, after getting a paper cut, you can wash it, put some Neosporin on, and cover it with a bandage. You can't necessarily speed up the time it takes for the wound to heal, but you can

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change the environment to allow the wound to heal more easily. The same is said for a joint replacement. If you smoke, eat sugary/inflammatory foods, drink alcohol, etc, then you have negatively impacted the healing environment, further delaying the time it takes for the joint replacement to heal. Make sure to:

- eat more fruits/vegetables (5-9 servings), eat good fats (avocado, fish oil, flax oil, fish, mixed nuts),
- Get 6 hours of REM sleep to allow the body to repair and heal.
- Reduce your stress
- Decrease sugar intake and eat less processed foods.
- Drink less sugary drinks. Instead try water or green tea. On average, try to drink half your body weight in oz of water.
- Eat 20-30 grams of high-quality protein per meal.

- ✓ **Clean skin** - Having clean skin can promote healing because you are promoting a good healing environment. Unless otherwise recommended by your surgeon, make sure not to put anything on the incision after the surgery (like topical creams or ointments). Your surgeon will give you a general time frame where it is appropriate to start putting topicals on the incision site. It is also important not to soak the incision. Typically, it is ok to shower (no bathes) a day or two after surgery, so long as you do not soak the area.
- ✓ **Do your homework** - Finding the right surgeon: I would recommend looking at reviews of the surgeon, researching their specialties, and success rates. For instance, if you are an athlete who sprained their ACL, then a sports-specific surgeon might be the right choice for you. However, if you are a 65-year-old who is relatively sedentary, then the sport specific surgeon who works on Olympic athletes may not be your best option. Online reviews also give you some insight into how the surgeon functions. Reviews can tell you about the surgeon's bedside manner as well as what kind of success others in your situation have had.

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- ✓ **Maintain a regular fitness routine** – I always tell people that if you go into a surgery strong and flexible, then you will also come out of surgery stronger and more flexible compared to someone who is sedentary. There is research to suggest that if you have pre-hab (therapy before the surgery), your results are much better afterwards. Taking that into consideration, imagine if you have done weeks or months of a consistent strengthening/flexibility/conditioning routine prior to the surgery. It makes sense that you will be better off for it in the long run. As part of a regular fitness routine, I would suggest using a full body approach where you include a pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, and mobility component. For example: (pushing can include pushups wall pushups, modified, floor pushups, etc). (Pulling can include rows, pullups). Lifting includes (dead lifts, squats, lunges). Carrying (farmers carries, carrying different heavy objects), and mobility (walking, biking, hiking, etc).
- ✓ **Do physical therapy after your joint replacement** - PT after having a joint replacement is crucial in the success of your recovery. Yes, I have heard stories of someone's friend who didn't have therapy and they did great. However, these success stories are far and few. Having a trained movement specialist analyze how you are doing and recovering is essential to optimizing the right healing environment. When someone comes to see me after a joint replacement, I take the time to get to know them and make sure that we address whatever they want to get out of therapy. For instance, if it is your goal to get back to hiking or playing with your kids/grandkids, then I make that a priority. We make sure that you are walking and moving appropriately, without a hitch in your step. We also make sure to track your progress along the way by taking appropriate objective measurements. This ensures that the tactics and exercises we prescribe for you are working. If something is not working as well as we would like, then we know right away and can adjust your routine accordingly.

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****BONUS TIP: Massage therapy** can help reduce inflammation, swelling, and pain AND helps decrease your recovery time, reduce stress, and reduce the chances of losing mobility.

BONUS BONUS TIP: Persistence: set goals for yourself and be diligent in your approach to getting better.