

# **Total Joint Replacement**

**Brinceton M. Phipps MD**  
Animas Orthopedic Associates  
575 Rivergate Lane, Suite 105  
Durango Colorado  
970-259-3020  
www.brincetonphippsmd.com  
www.animasorthopedics.com

## ***Frequently Asked Questions:***

### **Preoperative:**

Q: What is the chance of success?

A: Success is difficult to assess. The most important factor relates to your expectation of success. Total joint replacement is one of the most successful operations when performed in the right patient. While total joints have seen great advancement they are still not better than your native joint prior to arthritis. 98% of patients will answer yes to the following three questions 1 year after surgery:

1. Are you glad you had the surgery?
2. Did it fulfill your expectations?
3. Would you do it again?

Q: What is the recovery time?

A: There will be individual variations in recovery time. Most will be able to walk without an assist device (crutches, cane, walker) in a few weeks and return to normal function by 3 months. Wearing in and improvement may occur over the first year.

Q: How long will I be in the hospital?

A: While some centers are attempting to make joint replacement an outpatient procedure (I do offer outpatient arthroplasty procedure in appropriate candidates), I feel most patients will require 1-2 days of hospitalization. Pre-existing medical conditions (heart problems, diabetes, hypertension, kidney problems, pulmonary problems) may lengthen your hospital stay. Patients will be discharged home when their pain is well controlled on oral medications and they have been cleared by physical therapy.

Q: Will I go home or to a rehabilitation unit?

A: Most will be discharged home and participate in an outpatient physical therapy program. Most insurance programs do not recognize total joint replacement as criteria for admission to a rehabilitation facility unless extenuating medical conditions exist. If social or health issues prevent discharge home you may be transferred to a skilled nursing facility with therapy. Please note that if you are considering a rehabilitation unit after surgery it would be advisable to visit prior to surgery.

Q: When can I drive?

A: For surgery on the right leg it is recommended that you not drive for 4 weeks. You may drive thereafter if you feel comfortable applying enough force to brake suddenly and you are no longer taking narcotics for pain control. For left leg surgery you may drive as soon as you feel comfortable and are no longer taking narcotics.

Q: When can I travel?

A: As soon as you feel comfortable. It is recommended that you stretch and walk each hour during long trips to prevent blood clots in your legs (deep venous thrombosis).

Q: When can I return to work?

A: For a sedentary job (ex. desk work) you may return in 2-4 weeks. For more labor intensive work you should plan on at least 3 months. Average time to return to work across all jobs is just under 9 weeks.

Q: What activities are permitted?

A: You may return to all low-impact activities when you feel comfortable (walking, golf, swimming, bicycling, skiing). You should avoid high impact activities such as running and jumping.

Q: How long will my joint replacement last?

A: The literature reports a 0.5-1% chance of requiring additional surgery each year. So at 10 years, 90-95% are functioning normally and at 20 years 80-85% remain normal. After 20 years the success declines more rapidly. There is promising data that the newer components may exceed these expectations.

Q: Will my legs be the same length?

A: Knee replacements rarely notice any real or functional differences. For hip replacements a leg length discrepancy may occur requiring the use of a shoe lift. The chance of this occurring is increased by a prior leg length difference, severe hip arthritis, and/or severe back issues. For hip replacements, achieving stability of the hip joint super-cedes exact equalization of leg lengths.

Q: Do I need to see my primary physician prior to surgery?

A: I feel it is very beneficial to see or at a minimum notify your primary physician to ensure that your health status is optimized prior to surgery. If you do not have a primary physician then we will assist you in obtaining one for evaluation.

Q: Do I need dental clearance prior to joint replacement?

A: Ordinarily no. If however you suspect you have a dental infection, have poor dental hygiene, or have not had a dental check up in 12 months then it would be advisable to proceed with a formal dental examination.

Q: What are the chances of complications?

A: Complication rates vary. The most important risk of complications is related to the health status of the patient. Patients with health issues are at greater risk of complications. Some of the most important include but are not limited to; diabetes, heart disease, pulmonary disease, kidney disease, rheumatoid arthritis, vascular disease and obesity. Diabetics should have optimum blood glucose control and those whose HbA1c are elevated will likely be postponed. Patient who are found to have active infections or illnesses should delay surgery until the issue is resolved. The risk of infection at our facility is below the national average. National average being between 1-2%.

### **Perioperative Questions**

Q: What type of anesthesia will I have?

A: Ultimately that decision is made between you and the anesthesiologist. I however, strongly recommend you consider a spinal anesthetic. Spinal anesthesia is associated with less blood loss, lower risk of blood clots, lower risk of stroke, less post-operative nausea, less pain, and faster recovery (many of these claims are debated).

Q: Will I have a catheter in my bladder (Foley)?

A: Most patients receive a Foley catheter that remains in place until the day after surgery. There are some rare exceptions.

Q: Will I have an intravenous (IV) line?

A: Yes. Having IV access for the first day is important for the rapid administration of medications. The patient will receive IV antibiotics 1 hour prior to surgery and usually no longer than 24 hours after surgery.

Q: Will I require a blood transfusion?

A: National statistics are 12% need for transfusion for knee replacements and 19% for hip replacements. Our facility employs tactics to decrease the need for blood transfusion. Our transfusion rate is well below 5%. We can usually identify who might require a transfusion before surgery (persons who are anemic prior to surgery or who have more complicated medical or surgical issues).

Q: Are narcotics necessary?

A: I prefer starting out with narcotics and then decreasing their use based on patient comfort. I have had patients not use narcotics but it is very important that the patients pain be well controlled so that they may participate and progress with therapy. Playing “catch up” on pain control is not ideal. Some patients do react poorly to narcotics and final pain medication treatment will be tailored postoperatively. Patients who have been on narcotics leading up to surgery may experience increased difficulties with pain control.

Q: When can I shower?

A: Once a waterproof dressing is applied you may shower. Typically the day after surgery. You should keep a dressing on the incision for at least 1 week.

Q: When can I immerse the site in a bathtub or pool?

A: Typically 3-4 weeks after surgery. I favor closer to 4 weeks just to be on the safe side.

Q: (*For knee replacement only*) Do I need a CPM (continuous passive motion machine)?

A: There is no evidence that a CPM improves recovery or outcome in the long term. I advise patients to try the machine. Duration of use is typically 3 weeks and currently is covered by most insurers.

Q: When will my sutures/staples be removed?

A: Often I use an absorbable suture placed below the skin and Dermabond (super glue for the skin) on top and therefore there are no sutures/staples to remove. If however your skin condition required sutures/staples they are typically removed at 10-14 days.

Q: How long will I be on pain medication?

A: It is common to require pain medication for up to 2-3 months. Initially you will be taking a narcotic. You may choose to switch to an over-the-counter medication such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen as soon as you are comfortable. Most discontinue narcotic by 4-6 weeks. Requiring narcotics beyond 3 months is unusual.

Q: How long will I be on an anti-coagulant (“blood thinner”)?

A: For knee surgery the duration is 10-14 days. For hip surgery the duration is 21-35 days. I typically use Xarelto which is an oral pill. It is easy to monitor and administer and has a very high safety margin. The medication is expensive but it is necessary. An alternative is an injectable anti-coagulant but it too is expensive. Coumadin (Warfarin) is a much cheaper option but is difficult to manage and requires regular blood draws to monitor its effectiveness. I typically reserve its use for persons who are on it for another reason. Recently the

AAOS has demonstrated that Aspirin therapy may be safe in select individuals but I feel our elevation precludes its routine use. I do recommend patients consider Aspirin 325mg daily after completing the Xarelto or other chosen agent for 60 days unless you have a contraindication to its use. Your specific anti-coagulant and duration of use will be based on your risk of developing clots against your risk of having a bleeding event.

Q: Can I consume alcohol during my recovery?

A: If you are taking coumadin you should avoid alcohol. Only very modest consumption should occur if you are taking narcotics (I do allow for a glass of alcohol when in the hospital). Beyond this, you may consume in moderation at your own discretion.

Q: How long should I take iron supplements?

A: I no longer recommend iron post-operatively as its benefit has been called into question and it can contribute to constipation which is common after surgery and while taking narcotics.

Q: Should I apply ice or heat?

A: Initially ice is most effective at reducing swelling. After 2 weeks you may use which ever makes you most comfortable.

Q: How long should I wear compressive stockings?

A: I prefer the use of the compressive stockings (TED hose) until the first postoperative visit (2 weeks). After discontinuing, if your ankles swell then you should use them until this normalizes. For long trips they are recommended for 3 months following surgery.

Q: Can I use stairs?

A: I recommend going upstairs leading with your non-operative leg and going down stairs lead with your operative leg. "Good leg up, bad leg down." This will be taught to you by our therapy team.

Q: Will I need physical therapy?

A: As a matter of habit I use formal therapy but in select situations you may not need therapy. Initially they may need to come to you until you are able to present to an outpatient program. Therapy can be essential to short and long term improvement. Typical duration 6-8 weeks.

Q: When can I engage in intercourse?

A: For knee replacement and anterior hip replacement as soon as you are comfortable. For posterior hip replacement you should wait for at least 6 weeks and focus on your hip precautions.

### **Post Operative Questions**

Q: I feel depressed. Is this normal?

A: It is not uncommon. Factors such as pain, narcotic usage, increased dependency on others, and limitations in mobility can contribute to mild depression. These feelings usually subside as you recover. If these feelings are pervasive or persistent please bring them up to me or your primary physician.

Q: I have insomnia. Is this normal?

A: This is a very common complaint. Over-the-counter Benadryl or Melatonin may be effective. If not you may require a prescription medication.

Q: I am constipated. Is this normal?

A: It is very common. A stool softener (Colace over-the-counter) is recommended. Drink plenty of water. Our hospital provides a post-operative plan to assist with constipation. It is very important that if you have painful constipation that you cease all narcotic consumption and notify us or present to an emergency department. If a long acting narcotic is prescribed it is the first agent that should be stopped until constipation is improved.

Q: How much knee range of motion do I need? (*knee replacement only*)

A: You need 70 degrees of flexion to walk normally, 90 degrees to ascend stairs, 100 degrees to descend stairs. If you have not achieved 90 degrees of knee flexion by 6 weeks you may need to have a manipulation under anesthesia. You should be able to achieve near full extension by 4 weeks. The component used can allow between 140-150 degrees arc of motion. Patients with prior surgeries or limitations in range of motion prior to surgery are much more likely to have difficulty obtaining optimum range of motion.

Q: My legs feel different in length. Is this normal? (*hip replacement only*)

A: The degenerative process that is arthritis took years if not decades to develop. Rapid operative correction usually makes the operative leg feel different in length whether it is or not. Give yourself some time to adjust. If there is a true leg length discrepancy, you may require a shoe lift. Again, a stable hip is of greater importance than exact equalization of leg lengths.

Q: Will I set off security detectors at airports and other locations?

A: Probably. Wallet cards indicating surgical implants are no longer recognized. You will have to inform the security officer of your surgery and may be asked to demonstrate the incision so wear appropriate apparel. Over 1 million total joint replacements are performed each year so you are not alone.

Q: Do I need antibiotics before dental work or other surgeries?

A: Avoid any invasive procedures for 6 weeks after surgery. For simple dental cleaning antibiotics are not required. For invasive procedures it has been recommended to take antibiotics prior to the procedure for 2 years after surgery. The most recent update states antibiotics are not required unless the patients immune status is compromised. I recommend antibiotics for dentistry of any form for the first two years and then at patient discretion. If your dentist has a recommendation then you should take that into consideration as well.

Q: Do I need antibiotics if I cut myself, get a viral infection, or any other type of bacterial infection?

A: Simple “nicks” do not require antibiotics but if you have an injury that is obviously infected or requires medical assistance then you should seek medical attention and notify the provider that you have a joint replacement. Viral conditions do not require antibiotic coverage. If you have a bacterial infection you should consult your primary physician.

For additional information refer to our website at [www.brincetonphippssmd.com](http://www.brincetonphippssmd.com), [www.animasorthopedics.com](http://www.animasorthopedics.com), or the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons at [www.aaos.org](http://www.aaos.org), American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons at [www.aahks.org](http://www.aahks.org) or visit any of the joint manufacturers websites. I typically use Smith and Nephew, Stryker, or Biomet.