

Hip Replacement: Rehabilitation after Surgery

KEY POINTS

- Rehabilitation after hip replacement will help you get stronger and improve your range of motion. It will get easier and less painful to move your hip.
- An occupational or physical therapist will help you learn how to adjust your daily activities so that they are safe and comfortable for you. You will learn how to move, sit, and lie down without stressing your new hip.
- It is important to avoid falling, and to put only the amount of weight on your leg that is approved by your provider.

Right after surgery the range of motion that is safe for your new hip is limited. Your hip will need special care until you have completely healed. Your healthcare provider and therapists will work with you to develop a plan for healing and rehabilitation. This plan will help you get stronger and improve your range of motion. You will use a walking aid, such as a walker or crutches, after surgery. Your provider will probably prescribe pain medicine. Medicines or therapy may also be prescribed to prevent blood clots.

As you recover from the surgery, it will get easier and less painful to move your hip.

What treatments will help my hip heal?

Your new hip joint has a limited range of movement while you heal. You will need to take special precautions, such as not bending over at the waist, to avoid putting a strain on the surgical area or displacing the joint. Your healthcare provider may recommend physical or occupational therapy, rest, heat, ice, and exercise.

Physical or occupational therapy

An occupational or physical therapist will help you learn how to adjust your daily activities so that they are safe and comfortable for you. Your therapist can show you how to:

- Use a shower bench or chair to bathe
- Use tools to put on and take off socks and shoes
- Use tools to help you reach or grab objects that are too high or too low for you to reach easily. Don't use step stools or ladders to reach high places.
- Turn and move into a different position without twisting or straining your hip such as when you get in and out of bed or a car
- Stand without turning your leg inward on the side of your new hip
- Use a walker

Avoid climbing, heavy lifting, and unusual vigorous physical activity until your provider tells you that it's OK.

Resting your hip

Rest is an important part of treatment after surgery. Try to avoid movements and activities that increase your pain. If you are having pain with an activity or movement, stop. Be sure to use your crutches or walker as instructed by your healthcare provider. Put only the amount of weight on your leg that is approved by your provider.

Heat

Use heat only if your healthcare provider tells you to do so. A moist hot pack, a heating pad, or warm shower or bath may help to relieve pain. Use heat on the sore area for 15 to 20 minutes up to 4 times each day. It's not a good idea to sleep with an electric heating pad at night.

Ice

Put an ice pack, gel pack, or package of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth on the sore area for 10 to 15 minutes up to 4 times each day. Ice helps to keep swelling down and relieve pain.

Exercise

Exercising to improve your balance, range of motion, and strength can help you control pain and go back to your usual activities. It can also help you avoid future problems. Your physical therapist will teach you the proper way to do your exercises so that you strengthen your hip without hurting it. Do your exercises as recommended. Follow the weight-bearing restrictions that your healthcare provider gives you.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider and physical therapist. In addition:

- When lying on your side, place a pillow between your legs to keep your hip joint in the proper position. When lying on your back, use a special pillow or splint to keep your hip in the proper position.
- Avoid chairs that are too low. When sitting, keep your knees below the level of your hips. You may need to sit on a pillow to keep your knees lower than your hips. Do not sit in chairs that lean back too far. Getting up from these chairs can cause problems in your hips. Use an elevated toilet seat to keep your knees lower than your hips when you sit on the toilet.
- When sitting, keep your feet about 6 inches apart. Avoid crossing your legs or ankles whether you are sitting, standing, or lying down. When getting up from a chair, slide toward the edge of the chair and then use your walker or crutches for support as you get up.
- It is important to prevent falling. To help with this:
 - Make sure your home has good lighting.
 - Remove or secure anything that you might trip over such as loose or trailing electric cords, tubes, pet leashes, or yarn.
 - Arrange furniture so that it is not in the way when you walk around the house.

- Sometimes loose throw rugs can cause a fall. Carpet and stair treads should be tacked down firmly.
- Make sure that stairs have safety handrails on both sides.
- Use nonslip mats in the bathtub or shower.
- Wear rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes that fasten securely. Avoid shoes with soles that are too slippery or too sticky such as some crepe or rubber soles. Avoid wearing high heels and sandals with light straps.
- Avoid climbing, heavy lifting, and using step stools or ladders to reach high places. Get help when you need it.
- Sit down to pull on pants and underwear. It's easy to trip yourself if you try to step into pants or a skirt while you are standing up.
- Also, don't drink too much alcohol or take too much medicine that makes you sleepy. This can make it easier to lose your balance and fall.
- Stay physically active, according to the advice of your healthcare provider or therapist. Once you have healed, walk a mile a day if you can.
- Try to keep a healthy weight. If you have overweight, lose weight.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can resume sexual activity and if you should avoid certain positions to protect your new hip.

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