



Heal. Move. Live.

Step by Step Guide to

**RECOVERING FROM
KNEE REPLACEMENT
SURGERY**

And What to Expect Following Surgery

By Dr. Richard Hulsey

Did you know that over 600,000 knee replacements are performed in the United States every year?¹ With the steady rise in obesity among U.S. adults and employees staying in the workplace longer, experts predict the number of knee replacements to rise to over 3,000,000 by 2030.

Total knee replacement, or total knee arthroplasty (TKA) as it's officially labelled, is becoming routine and empowering for patients in need of more mobility. Approximately 90 percent of patients who undergo a total knee replacement are relieved of knee-related pain following surgery. This is a staggering experience for so many patients who have lived with chronic knee pain for years. The chance to play golf, run after grandkids, hit the dance floor, and more is giving many patients a new lease on life.

Recovering from knee replacement surgery is also more complete than ever. Between

the advances in medical technology, improvements in surgical techniques, and years of research, total knee replacements are lasting longer and longer. Patients who undergo total knee replacement have a 90-95% chance of their new knee lasting at least 10 years and an 80-85% chance of their knee lasting at least 20 years.²

Even if you've undergone major surgery before, you may have questions about what to expect following knee replacement surgery. Some of your questions may be:

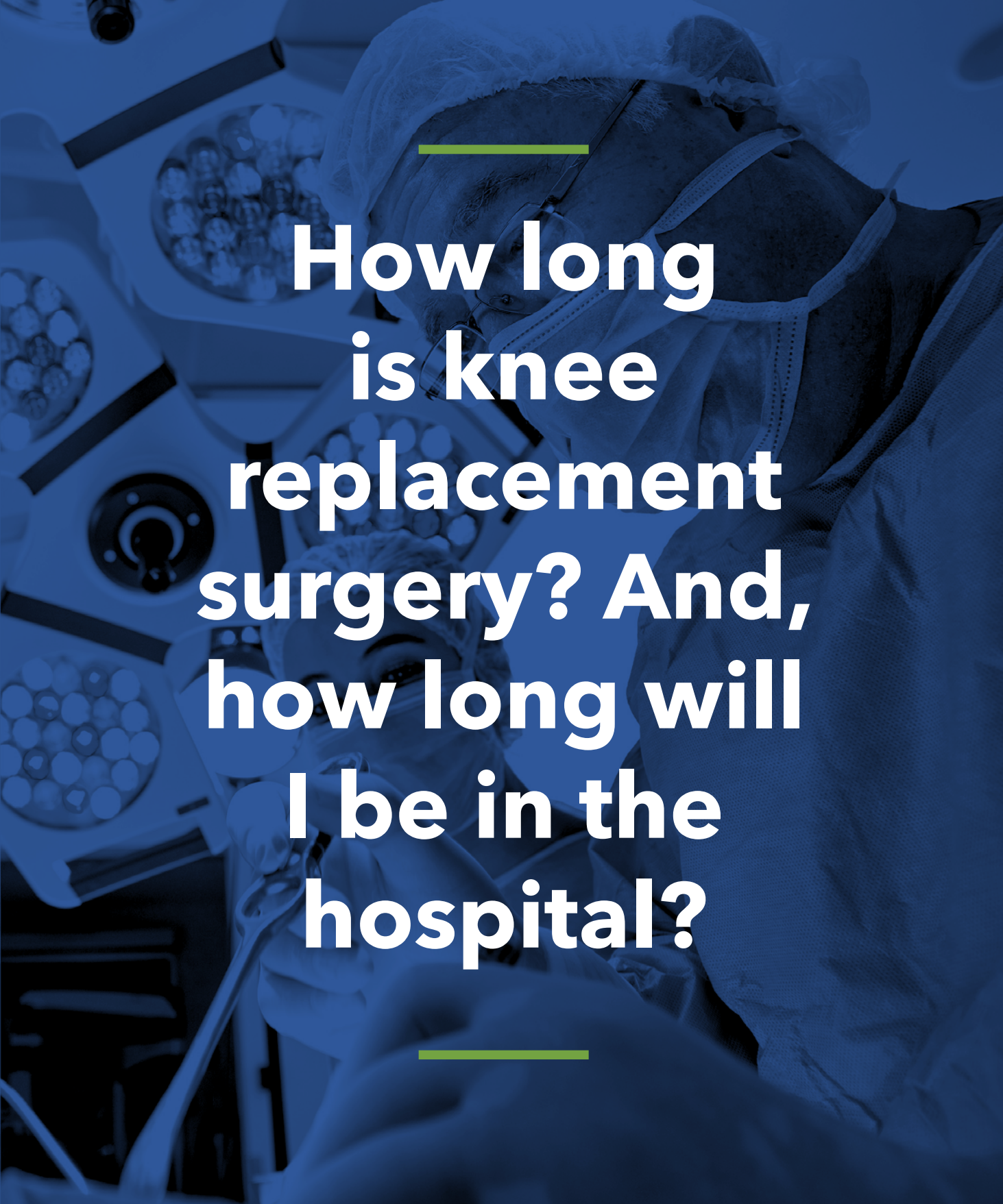
1) How long is the surgery? And, how long will I be in the hospital?

2) What wound and pain management tips should I follow?

3) What type of physical therapy can I expect?

4) When will I be able to enjoy life with my new knee?

Our goal in creating this resource is to give you a realistic timeline that you may experience as you recover from knee replacement surgery. Of course, every patient's condition and level of health is unique, so it's important to see this resource as a guidebook and not a guarantee for your recovery.



How long is knee replacement surgery? And, how long will I be in the hospital?

The actual surgery time for knee replacement is often between one to two hours from start to finish. Knee replacement surgery can be done under general anesthesia or regional anesthesia, either spinal anesthesia or epidural anesthesia. A peripheral nerve block is frequently performed for post-surgical pain management. Recent data suggests that regional anesthesia may be preferred because it reduces the risk of unnecessary complications. If you are considering knee replacement surgery, talk with your orthopedic surgeon about your options when it comes to anesthesia.

The immediate recovery period following surgery starts with a two-hour (or longer) stay in the Recovery Room to monitor your blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, oxygen levels, and other vitals. Once your vitals are stable and you are alert, you will be moved to your hospital room. Patients who undergo knee replacement typically stay in the hospital for **one to two days**. As we mentioned before, your response and recovery to the surgery, including your time in the hospital, will depend on your age, health condition before surgery, and any other medical complications.



Pain management while recovering from knee replacement surgery

Thankfully, much of the pain associated with knee replacement is reduced due to regional anesthesia and almost immediate physical therapy to reduce stiffness and pain. Your surgeon will prescribe an appropriate set of pain medications to help you manage your pain in the coming days and weeks. We highly recommend following your prescribed medication regimen while keeping a close eye on any side effects that may arise.

It's also recommended that you elevate and apply ice to your knee in the days and weeks after surgery. This reduces swelling in the knee and limits pain during recovery. Be careful when applying ice to protect the skin and incision area from becoming too cold for too long. Applying ice for 10-15 minutes at a time four to six times a day may be an excellent regimen to follow.

Wound care for knee replacement

Your doctor may use a more standard wound dressing to cover the stitches or staples over the incision area. You must keep the wound area clean, dry, and clear of any debris. Many surgeons use waterproof bandages that will allow you to shower as early as the day after surgery. If you notice any hint of infection, such as redness or abnormal swelling, you should contact your doctor at the first sign.



What to expect with physical therapy following knee replacement

Early range of motion exercises are essential to regain knee function. Your surgeon may recommend using a continuous passive motion (CPM) machine to start your physical therapy. As the name suggests, a CPM machine helps your new knee move through its range of motion while your pain is controlled.

Initiating movement of your knee at the first opportunity encourages blood flow and healing. Many patients are able to walk the day of surgery with the assistance of a walker. It's likely that you will also have to undergo outpatient physical therapy to fully regain your range of motion and strength. Depending on your health condition before surgery and your age, you may only need physical therapy for a short period of time following surgery.

An experienced physical therapist can teach you specific exercises to regain your full range of motion, which is a critical in order to improve mobility and function. A knee replacement patients will need to complete physical therapy one to three times per week depending on their physical condition and age. Some surgeons recommend a daily regimen of light physical therapy exercises to encourage blood flow while reserving the more labor-intensive exercises to be completed only once to twice per week.



When will I be able to enjoy life with my new knee?

Most patients are able to resume most activities after three months following surgery. However, heavy labor, running, and jumping may take much longer and complete healing can take up to a year after surgery.

The length to which you complete your physical therapy exercises has a significant impact on how well you recover. You may find yourself wanting to jump right up and be active after a few weeks. It's best to wait until your doctor gives you the go-ahead to enjoy life with your new knee.

If you have questions or concerns about knee replacement surgery, our Orthopedic Associates team is here for you. We help numerous patients of all ages and backgrounds undergo and make full recoveries from knee replacement surgery every year. We are committed to helping you know if knee replacement surgery is right for you and what steps to take to transition into a new phase of life with an artificial knee.

Our board-certified physicians are St. Louis' best at orthopedic care. You can start a conversation with our staff today by calling (314) 569-0612 or [scheduling your next appointment with Orthopedic Associates.](#)

Resources

- 1 <http://www.anationinmotion.org/value/knee>
- 2 <http://www.aahks.org/care-for-hips-and-knees/do-i-need-a-joint-replacement/total-knee-replacement>

Heal. Move. Live.
