

Frequently Asked Questions about Knee Surgery

Information is set out under the following headings:

- Before Surgery
- After Surgery
- Arthroscopy
- Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction
- Knee Replacement
- Other

BEFORE SURGERY

Do I need to cease using Aspirin prior to my procedure?

No.

Do I need to cease my anti inflammatory medication prior to surgery, including a joint replacement?

No.

Can I still take my blood pressure tablets with a sip of water when I am fasting?

Yes.

What time will I be discharged from hospital if I am staying overnight?

Generally at 10am.

AFTER SURGERY

My postoperative appointment after my surgery isn't for another 2-3 weeks. Can I take my dressings off prior to this appointment?

Dressings can be taken off 10 days after surgery. Leave Steristrips in place until 14 days. These can be removed at that time.

How long do I wear my compression bandage (Tubigrip)?

Keep on until your postoperative visit. After this just wear it during the day until the swelling is gone. This varies depending on the procedure.

How long after surgery can I get my leg wet?

You will have waterproof dressings on your wound. You can shower straight away, but should probably avoid getting in a swimming pool for about 10 days.

When I stand up it feels as if the blood is rushing into my leg. It makes it hard to stand. What can I expect?

This is common and will settle over a few days. If this is happening it is a good idea to hang your leg over the bed with the foot on the ground for a minute before you stand up. Keep moving your foot up and down to stop blood pooling in your calf.

My leg is swollen and painful. Do I need to worry?

This is a difficult question to answer. Pain and swelling in the leg are common after surgery. If it just on the shin, it can usually be ignored as it will settle with elevation and icing. If it is in the calf you should make sure the Tubigrip is not too tight (cutting into the calf) and elevate the leg for 24 hours. If you can move your foot and ankle up and down without it hurting in the calf it is probably part of the normal response to surgery. If it does not improve it is worth getting it checked by your General Practitioner who may organise an ultrasound scan to exclude a blood clot.

My knee is bruised and it seems to be getting worse and moving down my leg. What can I expect?

Bruising is quite common and may not appear for up to a week after surgery. It is the result of bleeding into the tissues that occurred around the time of surgery. It moves down the leg as a result of gravity. Although it can be dramatic in its appearance and may be painful (especially over the shin) it is usually nothing to worry about if the wound itself is dry and healing.

The front of my knee is very sensitive and it hurts to kneel. What can I expect?

This is common. It takes up to 2 to 3 months for the sensitivity related to the cuts to settle. Massage of the area may help.

There is a numb patch on my knee/leg. What can I expect?

This relates to damage to small nerves in the skin. It is common and generally unavoidable. Usually the numbness will gradually resolve or the area will gradually get smaller. If the numbness persists your brain will tend to "forget" about it and you will probably not notice it later on.

When I touch the cut I can feel tingling in the skin nearby. What can I expect?

This relates to damage to small nerves in the skin. It is common and generally unavoidable. Usually the sensation will gradually resolve. Massage of the area may help.

ARTHROSCOPY

If I live interstate or a long distance away, do I have to return to Melbourne for my postoperative visit?

An appointment will be made for about 2 weeks after surgery. If you are not having any problems you can cancel this appointment, but please give the office a few days notice as there are always people wanting an earlier appointment.

How long after an arthroscopy can I fly?

2-3 days if returning home. We recommend against other interstate travel for at least 2 weeks (there may be an increased risk of a deep vein thrombosis). It is probably safer to avoid overseas travel for about 4 weeks. If you do have to fly, remove the Tubigrip bandage from your knee during the flight as it tends to bunch up behind your knee, which may obstruct the veins. Consider wearing compression socks or stockings or "Skins".

How long until I can return to work after an arthroscopy?

This depends on what sort of work you do. If it is mainly deskwork, then you may be able to work within 4-5 days. If heavy manual work is involved, it may be 4-6 weeks before you can consider return to work. For manual work, you may be able to do light duties from 1-2 weeks but would not be able to climb ladders for 3-4 weeks. Your knee will probably not be able to tolerate standing all day for about 2 weeks.

How soon can I drive after an arthroscopy?

Essentially you can drive whenever you feel comfortable and confident from the day after surgery.

Do I need to see a physiotherapist after an arthroscopy?

You will have seen a physio in hospital who will have gone over the care of your knee. You will also have received a brochure covering rehabilitation or can download it from this website. If you are progressing through the program in the brochure without any problems, then there is no real need to go to physio. But if you are having problems physiotherapy will probably help you.

How long do I wear the compression bandage?

Keep on until your postoperative visit. After this just wear it during the day until the swelling is gone. This is usually about 2-3 weeks.

How long after an arthroscopy can I swim?

You can get in a swimming pool after 10 days and swim with pool buoy. It may take a few weeks until you are comfortable kicking.

I had an arthroscopy a few months ago and my knee has started clicking. What can I expect?

This is common and as long as your knee is not painful it doesn't matter. It is usually related to poor quadriceps muscle function. Work on strengthening the quadriceps (the muscle on the front of your thigh). The clicking should eventually settle.

ANTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT RECONSTRUCTION

If I live interstate or a long distance away, do I have to return to Melbourne for my postoperative visits after an ACL reconstruction?

An appointment will be made for about 3 weeks after surgery. This is an important visit as most potential problems can be detected at this time. After that the normal follow-up appointments are at 3 months, 6 months and 12 months from surgery. We do take individual circumstances into consideration and may modify this to 4 months and 12 months.

How long after an ACL reconstruction can I fly?

2-3 days if returning home. We recommend against other interstate travel for at least 3 weeks (there may be an increased risk of a deep vein thrombosis). It is probably safer to avoid overseas travel for about 6 weeks. If you do have to fly, remove the Tubigrip bandage from your knee during the flight, as it tends to bunch up behind your knee, which may obstruct the veins. Consider wearing compression socks or stockings or "Skins".

How long until I can return to work after an ACL reconstruction?

This depends on what sort of work you do. If it is mainly deskwork, then you may be able to work within 2 weeks. If heavy manual work is involved, it may be 2-3 months before you can consider returning to work. For manual work, you may be able to do light duties from 3-4 weeks but would not be able to climb ladders for 6-8 weeks. Your knee will probably not be able to tolerate standing all day for about 6-8 weeks.

How soon can I drive after an ACL reconstruction?

Essentially you can drive whenever you feel comfortable and confident. This is usually 2 weeks for the left leg and three weeks for the right leg. Remember that your reflexes may be a bit slower for about 4 weeks.

Do I need to see a physiotherapist after my ACL reconstruction?

You will have seen a physio in hospital who will have gone over the care of your knee during the first 3 weeks. You will also have received a brochure covering rehabilitation or can download it from this website. Generally there is no need to go to a physio in the first 2-3 weeks. After that it really depends on how your knee is progressing, how independent you are and how easy it is to get to a physio. If you are progressing through the program in the brochure without any problems, then there is no real need to go to physio. But if you are having problems physiotherapy will probably help you.

I had a hamstring ACL reconstruction about three weeks ago and recently felt a snap in the back of my thigh. What can I expect?

This is very common and is a strain of the scar tissue that has been laid down where the hamstring tendons have been taken from. It may be associated with some bruising. It may make straightening of the knee difficult for up to a week. Keep going with your exercises and ice the area -it will settle!

How long do I wear my compression bandage after my ACL reconstruction?

Keep on until your postoperative visit. After this just wear it during the day until the swelling is gone. This is usually about 6-8 weeks.

How long after an ACL reconstruction can I swim?

You can get in a swimming pool after 10 days, swim with pool buoy after 2 weeks, but no kicking until 8 weeks.

I am getting cramps in my hamstring when I bend my knee bending after my ACL reconstruction. What can I expect?

This is common. Don't push the hamstring curls and work instead on stretching the hamstrings. If it is more than 4 months from your surgery you should start some "Nordic curls" (also called Russian curls).

KNEE REPLACEMENT

My dentist said I may need to take antibiotics prior to my upcoming dental treatment due to the fact I had a previous joint replacement?

There is no evidence to support the use of prophylactic antibiotics in this setting. It is probably wise to avoid dental work in the first 3 months after surgery. If you do need work done in this period then it is probably a good idea to have antibiotic cover. It is safer to have elective dental work done before surgery.

Can I have an MRI after having a total knee replacement?

Yes you can have an MRI on other areas of the body. However MRI of the affected joint will generally not work because of interference from the metal.

My leg and foot are still swollen, what can I expect?

Swelling can go on for 4-6 months after a knee replacement. As long as it is not painful and goes down overnight or with elevation, it is not a great concern. You may find it more comfortable to wear a compression sock or stocking.

Can I kneel after a knee replacement?

You are allowed to kneel if it feels comfortable. Sometimes the sensation over the front of the knee is abnormal and makes it uncomfortable to kneel. Sometimes a lack of flexion may also make it difficult. It may help to kneel on a pillow or cushion.

OTHER

Do you perform meniscal transplantation?

Not at present. The availability of meniscal transplants is very limited in this country. There is no evidence that meniscal transplantation changes long term outcome in terms of osteoarthritis.

Do you perform meniscal replacement?

Not at present. I do not think that the results are good enough to justify the procedure.

Do you perform autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI/MACI or cartilage grafting)?

Yes, but very rarely. I have found that one can usually get similar results with other procedures that are either simpler or need to be done in any case if ACI is undertaken e.g. a realignment procedure such as an osteotomy.

These notes have been prepared by orthopaedic surgeons at OrthoSport Victoria. They are general overviews and information aimed for use by their specific patients and reflects their views, opinions and recommendations. This does not constitute medical advice. The contents are provided for information and education purposes only and not for the purpose of rendering medical advice. Please seek the advice of your specific surgeon or other health care provider with any questions regarding medical conditions and treatment.

