

Knee Replacement: Week-by-Week Guide

A printable week-by-week guide to knee replacement recovery - hospital days, extension and swelling control, strength milestones and when to return to activity.

At a Glance

- The two jobs of early recovery: regain full knee extension and keep swelling down
- You will stand and often walk the same day - movement is medicine
- Ice and elevation are not optional in the first weeks; they control swelling
- Strength and stamina take months - expect a marathon, not a sprint

The First Weeks

Day 0-2 (hospital):

- Stand and walk with a walker as directed
- Do ankle pumps every hour while awake
- Press the back of the knee down to work on straightening
- Elevate and ice the knee

Week 1-2:

- Walk several times a day with a walker
- Do quad sets and straightening exercises several times a day
- Bend the knee gently with heel slides
- Ice after activity and keep swelling in check

Week 2-6:

- Progress from walker to cane as strength improves
- Work on straight-leg raises once the knee locks straight
- Start supported sit-to-stand and step-downs
- Expect discomfort, but back off on sharp pain or climbing swelling

Months 2-6

- Walk without aids when cleared; drive when your surgeon allows
- Build strength with sit-to-stand, step-downs and terminal knee extension
- Progress walking distance, then pace
- Return to cycling, swimming and low-impact activity as cleared
- Report any sudden pain, wound redness, fever or severe calf swelling

Do This

- Prioritize full knee extension - it predicts the best long-term result
- Move regularly, even a little, rather than sitting still for hours
- Elevate and ice to control swelling
- Follow the knee replacement rehabilitation guide phases

Avoid This

- Skipping extension work because it feels tight
- Doing too much too soon and driving up swelling
- Twisting or pivoting on the knee
- Pushing through sharp pain or ignoring new symptoms

When to See Someone

Contact your care team urgently for fever, a red or leaking wound, severe calf pain or swelling, sudden shortness of breath, or a knee that suddenly becomes very painful, hot or unstable.

References

1. AAOS OrthoInfo. "Total Knee Replacement Exercise Guide."
<https://www.orthoinfo.org/recovery/total-knee-replacement-exercise-guide/>
2. AAOS OrthoInfo. "Total Knee Replacement." <https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/treatment/total-knee-replacement/>

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