



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Knee Replacement Surgery

Knee replacement surgery is one of the treatments for severe knee pain. It may be recommended for damage caused by a traumatic event, for damage caused by a poor blood supply, or even for damage caused by advanced arthritis. Certain factors, however, may prevent you from having this surgery. These include: obesity, age, poor general health, or a recent knee infection.

Knee replacement surgery generally involves reshaping the knee bone and putting in metal and plastic implants to make the joint more structurally sound. Once a patient recovers from the operation, his or her knee usually can bend at least ninety degrees. Additionally, most patients experience a significant reduction of knee pain and can walk comfortably.

Knee replacement surgery has a number of drawbacks and risks, however, and they cannot be easily ignored. The fact is that any kind of joint replacement surgery places permanent restrictions on a person's activities. For example, you will never be able to safely run on a replaced knee, and you will never be able to safely lift—repeatedly—more than 25 pounds. You will also not be able to exercise in any kind of aggressive manner that places a lot of stress on the joint. However, taking walks, playing golf, swimming, bicycling on a level road, or using an exercise bike will still be very appropriate. These milder activities don't put too much strain on the implants and aren't as likely to loosen them.

Another drawback—and a potentially more serious problem—is that blood clots in the deep veins of the lower legs can occur in knee replacement surgeries. In some cases, medications to thin the blood must be taken for a long period of time. In rare instances a blood clot will form and travel to the lungs.

Still another drawback involves potential infection. This occurs in about one percent of all surgeries. This number is higher for diabetic patients or patients with a weakened immune system. In some cases, additional surgery is required to repair the damage caused by the infection. Occasionally, the infected knee cannot be saved and the patient must either have the knee fused straight or have to wear a straight knee brace in order to walk.

Finally, additional surgery is required in approximately five percent of all knee replacement patients. This is most often needed years after the initial operation, but usually within the first ten years after the initial surgery. It is typically required because of loosening of the replacement parts.

On the the other hand, the operation may substantially reduce your pain and improve your ability to walk. Naturally, you'll want to discuss all of your options with your doctor.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION