

Patient Information for Consent

OS41 Revision Total Knee Replacement

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Local information

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What is a revision total knee replacement?

A revision total knee replacement is an operation to take out your old knee replacement and put in a new one.

Your surgeon has recommended a revision total knee replacement operation. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your surgeon or the healthcare team.

What causes a knee replacement to fail?

A knee replacement can fail for the following reasons.

- Wearing out of the artificial joint – This releases tiny bits of plastic that can cause the joint to come loose from the bone.
- Infection in your knee replacement – Infection can make your knee replacement come loose from the bone.
- Dislocation (coming out of joint) – You may decide to have an operation to try to prevent this from happening again.
- Fracture (break) of the femur or the tibia around your knee replacement – This can happen if you fall heavily on your knee.

These problems can make it difficult for you to walk, and sometimes cause pain. Your surgeon will discuss with you why they have recommended a revision total knee replacement.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should be able to walk better and do more of your normal activities.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is the only treatment for a knee replacement that is failing.

If your knee replacement is wearing out, it may only be happening slowly. If your symptoms are mild, you and your surgeon may decide to watch and wait for a while. You will need to have regular x-rays.

If your knee replacement keeps coming out of joint, you can wear a brace to try to keep your knee in place. A brace is large and often uncomfortable.

If you have an infection in your knee replacement, you can sometimes keep it under control and prevent your knee replacement from failing by taking antibiotics. However, it is not usually possible to cure an infection without removing your knee replacement and having a long course of strong antibiotics. This treatment is not always successful, so it may be better to have a knee fusion operation (arthrodesis) to fix the bones in your knee together.

If you have a fracture around your knee replacement, you can sometimes have an operation to fix the fracture, without changing your knee replacement. You can sometimes be treated in a plaster cast. This does not always work and, often, your knee replacement will bend less well.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

If your knee replacement is coming loose because of wear or infection, it will probably get more painful over time. The bone around a loose knee replacement can get thin and it may break (fracture). It is likely that you will need a major operation to fix the fracture and do your knee replacement again.

If you have an infection in your knee replacement, it can spread to other places around your body, including other artificial joints and vital organs.

Your surgeon will discuss with you what is likely to happen.

What does the operation involve?

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct side. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you and recommend the best form of anaesthesia for you. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection.

Your surgeon will make a cut on the front of your knee. They will remove your knee replacement and any cement. This often takes a long time and can be difficult.

Your surgeon will put in a new knee replacement, which is often larger than your old one.

Your knee replacement is fixed into the bone using acrylic cement or special coatings on your knee replacement that bond directly to the bone (see figure 1). Your surgeon will close your skin with stitches or clips.

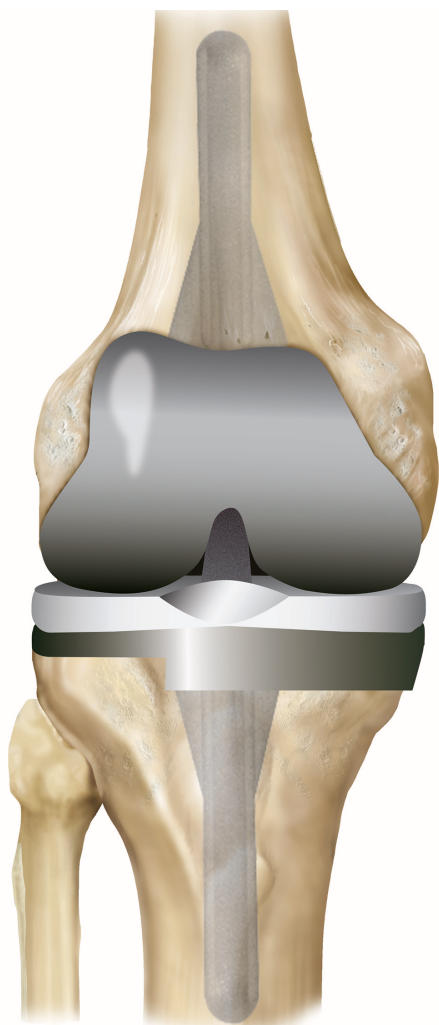


Figure 1
A revision total knee replacement

The type of surgery you need can be more complicated if you have an infection, or the bone is thin or broken. Your surgeon will discuss with you what the operation is likely to involve.

- If you have an infection in your knee replacement, you may need to have two separate operations. In the first, your surgeon will remove your old knee replacement, any cement and all infected material. They will put antibiotics in your knee and you will also need antibiotic injections for several weeks. An infection may take two to three months to go completely. You will need a second operation to put in the new knee replacement.
- If your bone is thin or has broken, they may need to build it up with a bone graft or with extra metal.

What should I do about my medication?

Let your doctor know about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the operation may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice. You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound.

- In the week before the operation, do not shave or wax the area where a cut is likely to be made.
- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation.
- Keep warm around the time of the operation. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make the operation as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and even cause death (risk: 1 in 250). You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

1 Complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

2 General complications of any operation

- Pain. The healthcare team will give you medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as you are told so you can move about as advised.

- Bleeding during or after the operation. You may need a blood transfusion.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin, although revision knee-replacement wounds usually heal to a neat scar.
- Difficulty passing urine. You may need a catheter (tube) in your bladder for one to two days.
- Infection of the surgical site (wound) (risk: 1 in 150). It is usually safe to shower after two days but you should check with the healthcare team. Keep your wound dry and covered. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need another operation.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis – DVT) (risk: 1 in 100). This can cause pain, swelling or redness in your leg, or the veins near the surface of your leg to appear larger than normal. The healthcare team will assess your risk. They will encourage you to get out of bed soon after the operation and may give you injections, medication, or inflatable boots or special stockings to wear. Let the healthcare team know straightaway if you think you might have a DVT.
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs (risk: 1 in 500). If you become short of breath, feel pain in your chest or upper back, or if you cough up blood, let the healthcare team know straightaway. If you are at home, call an ambulance or go immediately to your nearest Emergency department.
- Chest infection (risk: 1 in 100). You may need antibiotics and physiotherapy.
- Heart attack (where part of the heart muscle dies) (risk: 1 in 200). A heart attack can sometimes cause death.
- Stroke (loss of brain function resulting from an interruption of the blood supply to your brain) (risk: 1 in 1,000). A stroke can sometimes cause death.

3 Specific complications of this operation

- Split in the bone when your knee replacement is inserted, if the bone is weak (risk: 1 in 75). Your surgeon may need to fix the bone in place or use a different type of knee replacement.

- Damage to ligaments or tendons near your knee. Your surgeon may need to repair the damage using stitches, a piece of tendon from somewhere else in your body, or an artificial material.
- Damage to nerves around your knee, leading to weakness, numbness or pain in your leg or foot. This usually gets better but may be permanent.
- Damage to blood vessels around your knee, leading to loss of circulation to your leg and foot (risk: 1 in 400). You will need surgery straightaway to restore the blood flow.
- Infection in your knee, which can result in loosening and failure of your knee replacement over a period of a few months (risk: 1 in 75). The risk is higher if you had an infection in your knee replacement before the operation. You will usually need one or more further operations to control the infection. If you get any kind of infection, including a dental infection, get it treated straightaway as the infection could spread to your knee.
- Loosening without infection. You may need another operation to do your knee replacement again (risk: 1 in 30).
- Dislocation of your knee replacement. You will usually need another operation, sometimes urgently.
- Continued discomfort in your knee, even though your knee replacement works well.
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your knee (complex regional pain syndrome). The cause is not known. You may need further treatment including painkillers and physiotherapy. Your knee can take months or years to improve.

How soon will I recover?

• In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. You will usually have an x-ray to check the position of your knee replacement. The physiotherapist will help you to start walking using crutches or a walking frame, usually the next day. You may need to wear a brace to protect your knee. Follow the advice of the physiotherapist on how to use it. Your surgeon or the physiotherapist will tell you how much weight you can put on your leg.

Keep your wound dry for four to five days, and use a waterproof dressing when you have a bath or shower.

The healthcare team will tell you if you need to have any stitches or clips removed, or dressings changed.

You should be able to go home after four to seven days. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

• **Returning to normal activities**

To reduce the risk of a blood clot, make sure you follow carefully the instructions of the healthcare team if you have been given medication or need to wear special stockings.

The healthcare team will tell you when you can return to normal activities. To reduce the risk of problems, it is important to look after your new knee as you are told.

You will need to use crutches or walking sticks for a few weeks. It often takes longer to recover from a revision knee replacement than your first knee replacement.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

• **The future**

Most people make a good recovery and most revision total knee replacements work well. It is important to follow the advice the physiotherapist gives you about exercises to strengthen your knee muscles. It is common for your leg to be swollen after a knee replacement. It can take up to a year for the swelling to go down.

A revision total knee replacement can fail with time, if it wears out, or the original problem comes back. You may need another operation (risk: 1 in 5 by 10 years after the operation).

You should have an x-ray of your knee replacement at least every five years to check for any problems.

Summary

If your original knee replacement fails, you can usually have another operation to do your knee replacement again. If this revision operation is successful, you should be able to continue many of your normal activities.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Keep this information leaflet. Use it to help you if you need to talk to a healthcare professional.

Acknowledgements

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