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# Your Total Knee Joint Replacement at St Vincent's Private Hospital, Kew

## Mr Hayden Morris

# The Role of Physiotherapy



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## What is a total knee replacement?

A total knee replacement is a surgical procedure whereby the diseased knee joint is replaced with an artificial prosthesis. The knee is a hinge joint. During a total knee replacement, the end of the femur bone is removed and is replaced with a metal shell. The end of the lower bone (tibia) is also removed and replaced with a metal T piece with a plastic top. Depending on the condition of the kneecap, a plastic 'button' may also be added under the kneecap to improve the surface.



## Who should have a knee replacement?

A total knee replacement is considered for patients whose knee joints have been severely damaged by either progressive arthritis, trauma or other destructive diseases of the joint. The most common reason for knee replacement in Australia is severe osteoarthritis. The recommended time to have the replacement is when the arthritic pain is so severe that it becomes too difficult to perform your daily activities.

# What Physiotherapy do I have while I am in hospital and what does it involve?

**Physiotherapy is an extremely important part of rehabilitation** You will have physiotherapy at least once daily during your stay in hospital. We expect you to do your exercises another 2-3 times throughout the day on your own, or with the assistance of the nursing staff.

**The following is a general guide of what physio will involve each day:**

## **Day 0 (Day of surgery)**

- You will return to the ward with your knee on a large cushion which will keep your knee bent, this stays on until removed by the physios the next day

## **Day 1**

- You will generally get out of bed the day after your surgery, with the assistance of a walking frame and the physiotherapist
- You will be expected to perform some gentle bed exercises

## **Day 2**

- Your bed exercises (strength and knee range of movement) are progressed
- You will start walking further distances today, including to and from the bathroom throughout the day
- You will sit out of bed for meals if able



## **Day 3**

- Continue exercises. New exercises will be added when you are ready to progress.
- You may be taught how to use crutches today



## **Day 4**

- Continue exercises 3-4 times per day
- Practicing walking and transferring will help to increase your confidence



## **Day 5-7**

- Continue exercises 3-4 times per day
- You will learn how to independently negotiate stairs.
- You will usually be discharged home during this period, once all goals have been achieved.



## **What is the aim of the exercises?**

There are two main aims of the exercises following a total knee joint replacement.

### **1. To get the knee moving**

- You want to get as much BEND in the knee as possible to maximise your function following a knee joint replacement. There is a window of opportunity in the first 6-12 weeks to get the movement before scarring occurs. There can be some discomfort when doing the bend exercises but we need you to persevere with them as this can ultimately determine what function you will have in the knee in the long term.

### **2. To activate the quadriceps**

- The quadriceps muscles at the front of the thigh get inhibited by the surgery. They are one of the most important muscles to the function of the knee. It is therefore very important that we get them activated and working early.

## **When am I ready to leave hospital?**

Your surgeon will have the final say on when you can be discharged from hospital but from a physiotherapy point of view you need to achieve the following things before you can go home.

- ✓ Transfer in and out of bed independently
- ✓ Walk safely with the crutches more than 50m
- ✓ Safely and independently negotiate stairs
- ✓ Be independent with exercise program

We also aim to have the bend in your knee at 90 degrees or more before you leave.

On average people are in hospital for 5-7 days following a knee joint replacement.

## **Do I continue with physiotherapy once I leave hospital?**

We will give you a home exercise program on the day that you are going home. On it will be all the exercises that you have already been doing whilst in hospital. You should continue with those exercises 3-4 times per day until your review with the surgeon.

Once you are home if you are struggling to get to 90 degrees or more bend in your knee it is a good idea to have a review with a physiotherapist. They will be able to assist you with moving forward with your rehabilitation.

**Please contact us at Hawthorn Physio Clinic if we can assist you with your continuing rehabilitation on 9819 2827.**

Another great form of continuing your rehabilitation is with HYDROTHERAPY. Hydrotherapy is simply exercising in water. It can be great to relieve the aches and pain of traditional exercising. You can commence hydrotherapy 6 weeks post surgery with your surgeon's approval.



## Will I need any special equipment at home?

- Crutches will be needed for the first 6 weeks. These are available to hire or purchase from Vimy Private Hospital. Your Physiotherapist can organise this for you when you are ready to use the crutches.
- Some people find it useful to have a shower chair and toilet seat aid for the first couple of weeks at home. They are not essential but can aid bathroom mobility. These are not available for hire from the hospital but some places we recommend are:

-Able Medical Hire 9808 4999 Surrey Hills & Heidelberg  
-LifeHealthCare 9384 1846 Brunswick East



## What can I do prior to surgery to prepare myself?

Preparing mentally and physically for surgery is an important step towards a successful result. We find that patients who come well prepared cope better during the recovery period and have fewer problems.

One of the best ways to prepare for your knee replacement is to do a program of **prehabilitation**.

Prehabilitation is an exercise program aiming to prepare you both mentally and physically for the demands of surgery. It will help you improve your fitness, improve your strength in both arms and legs, improve your knee's flexibility, and gain fitness in a supervised gentle gym setting. These exercises will make it easier to mobilise following surgery, speed up your recovery of strength and range of movement, and lead to smoother recovery.

**At HAWTHORN PHYSIO CLINIC we offer a special prehabilitation program for all patients who are going to undergo their surgery at Vimy Private Hospital. If you undertake a minimum of 4 prehabilitation sessions at our clinic prior to your surgery we will claim the sessions on your private health insurance and just take the rebate. That means NO OUT OF POCKET EXPENSE for you!**

It is also a fantastic opportunity to become familiar with the Vimy hospital physiotherapists. We have a great environment where you will meet other patients, and we can answer any further questions you have along the way which will also help reduce anxiety and increase your preparedness.

**Call us on 9819 2827 to book your prehabilitation sessions today.**

## Commonly Asked Questions

- **When can I stop using the crutches?**

Most people are required to use crutches for 3-6 weeks following surgery.

*You will be able to walk without crutches when:*

1. You are confident you can manage on your own
2. You can walk un-aided without a limp
3. You can walk un-aided without pain and swelling

- **When can I go back to work?**

You may be able to return to pre-operative employment depending on the demands of your work environment

*Climbing ladders, heavy lifting and other activities involving excessive strain on the knee are not encouraged*

- **Can I play sport?**

*It is best to ask your surgeon at approx your 3 month review about returning to sport. It will usually depend on the intensity of the activity.*

- **When can I drive?**

You will not be allowed to drive a car for up to 6 weeks following your surgery as the knee control required to do so is not present. Long distance travel in a car should be avoided for the first month following your surgery as this may cause excessive swelling in your operated leg.

- **How long does pain and swelling last?**

**Pain** - Pain after a total knee replacement usually decreases rapidly during the first month. Feeling on and off stiffness in the knee is not uncommon throughout your

recovery. Give yourself 12 months following surgery for all these symptoms to completely subside

**Swelling** - Swelling in your feet occurs if you keep your legs in a dependent position for long periods of time. This can be improved by spending time with your feet elevated.

Swelling in your knee will remain until your knee overcomes the trauma of surgery. This type of swelling can be controlled by ensuring you balance rest and exercise and with the application of ice. Swelling in the knee may persist for 6-12 months post surgery.

- **How much exercise should I do and how can I tell if I've done too much?**

It is important to complete your home exercise program and progress your activity levels. However, in order to give your knee the time required to heal, you need to balance activity and rest and avoid over-exercising. You will know if you have over-exercised if your knee is painful and swollen following activity. Night time pain is also an indication of overdoing things throughout the day.

If you have any questions regarding your upcoming surgery please do not hesitate to call our physiotherapists. We are happy to help with any of your concerns.

Contact us on 9819 2827 (Hawthorn Physiotherapy Clinic)

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