



291 North Fireweed
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-6454

www.kenaipeninsulaortho.com

Orthopaedic Surgeon:
Henry G. Krull, M.D.

Hand and Wrist Specialist:
Edwin D. Vyhmeister, M.D.

TOTAL JOINT REPLACEMENT FAQ'S (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

BEFORE SURGERY:

1. *What is the chance of success?* Success is difficult to measure with a “score” or percentage, but rather in the ability to answer “yes” to the following three questions: 1. Are you glad you had the operation? 2. Did it fulfill your expectations? 3. Would you do it again? Approximately 98% of patients at 1 year will say “yes” to all 3 questions.
2. *What is the recovery time?* It depends on how recovery is defined, and varies from patient to patient. Most patients will use crutches or a walker for 2-4 weeks after surgery, then use a cane for about 1 month. You will gradually return to normal activities and by about 3 months post-operatively many patients are doing more than they were before surgery.
3. *Will I need rehabilitation after surgery?* For most people, physical therapy improves the rate of recovery, and is used for up to 1-2 months after surgery. Most patients do outpatient therapy, although home-therapy is ordered for some. Occasionally, patients need to remain hospitalized or are transferred to an inpatient rehabilitation facility for intensive physical therapy.
4. *When can I drive?* For hip replacement, approximately 6 weeks after surgery, but quicker if the left hip is replaced. For knee replacement, generally 4 weeks after surgery, sometimes sooner for the left knee. Do not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medication.
5. *When can I travel?* When you feel physically able to, and are reasonably comfortable. I usually recommend no major travel for 2 weeks.
6. *When can I return to work?* This depends on the type of work that you do. For sedentary-type work, 3-4 weeks after surgery is appropriate. For active labor-type work, 3-4 months may be needed.
7. *What activities are permitted following surgery?* Many patients are able to return to active lifestyles, and can often do more than they did before surgery. High-impact stresses should be minimized, as well as contact sports. Swimming and stationary bicycling are excellent low-impact activities.
8. *How long will my new joint last?* The “average” is 10-20 years, although it varies greatly from patient to patient. There is an approximately 1% per year



291 North Fireweed
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-6454

www.kenaipeninsulaortho.com

re-operation rate following joint replacement surgery, which means that that 1 year after surgery there is a 1% risk of re-operation. 10 years after surgery, there is a 10% risk of re-operation, but a 90% success rate without further surgery.

IN-HOSPITAL QUESTIONS:

1. *When can I bathe?* You may shower 3 days after surgery, if there is no drainage from the incision.
2. *When can I immerse the limb in a bath?* If the wound is completely healed and sutures / staples are removed, you may get in a bath or swimming pool 2 weeks after surgery.
3. *How long do I need to keep a bandage on the incision?* The surgical bandage will stay on for 1-2 days after surgery; for anterior hip surgery it is left on for 5 days and removed at home. The bandage may be left off if the incision appears healed and there is no drainage. A simple gauze bandage may be placed on for comfort for as long as desired.
4. *When will my sutures or staples be removed?* External sutures or staples, if any, are usually removed 2-3 weeks after surgery, at the first postoperative clinic visit. Often, dissolvable sutures are used that do not require removal. When these are used, steri-strips (like butterfly bandaids) will be placed on the incision, and remain in place for 2 weeks.
5. *For Posterior Hip Replacements: How long do I need to keep the pillow between my legs?* Immediately after surgery, an “abduction pillow” (or blue pillow) is placed between the legs to keep them apart, while in bed. At discharge, you may take the blue pillow home or use a regular pillow between your legs for a total of 6 weeks. Anterior hip replacements do not need pillows between the legs after surgery.

QUESTIONS FOR AFTER DISCHARGE

1. *How long will I be on pain medication?* It is not unusual to require some form of pain medication for up to 3 months after surgery. Stronger pain medications (narcotics) are used for the first 2-4 weeks, then antiinflammatories or over-the-counter pain medications are typically used after that.
2. *How long will I be on blood thinner medication?* Typically for 2 weeks (knees) and 6 weeks (hips) after surgery.
3. *Can I drink alcohol during my recovery?* You may use alcohol, in moderation, at your own discretion, but should avoid it if you are on narcotic pain medications.



291 North Fireweed
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-6454

www.kenaipeninsulaortho.com

4. *Should I apply ice or heat to the surgical site?* Generally ice is used initially, especially if there is swelling, for the first couple of weeks, then heat later. After several weeks, you may use whichever works best for you.
5. *How long should I wear the compression stockings?* These are worn for 2 weeks (knees) and 6 weeks (hips), to help prevent blood clots, but may be removed up to 1 hour per day for bathing / laundering.
6. *When can I resume sexual intercourse?* As soon as you are comfortable.
7. *Is it normal to feel depressed, or not be able to sleep well after surgery?* These are not unusual problems after joint replacement surgery, and typically resolve within 1-2 months without any treatment. Notify your primary care provider if it does not improve with time.

LONG-TERM QUESTIONS:

1. *Will I set off the security monitors at the airport?* You will probably set off the alarm at the security checkpoint, although most larger airports now use an x-ray scanner which will show the prosthesis. A physician's note does not help, and a hand-scan may be needed.
2. *Do I need antibiotics before dental work or an invasive medical procedure?* Yes. Avoid any dental cleaning or non-urgent procedures invasive procedures (such as colonoscopy) for as long as possible, particularly the first 6 months following joint replacement surgery. You or your dentist / doctor may call our office so that appropriate antibiotic protocol is followed.
3. *Do I need to follow up with my surgeon?* Patients are usually seen at 2 and 6 weeks following surgery, then at 3-, 6-, and 12-months afterward. Routine annual follow-up with x-rays is recommended after this one year postop period to monitor the prosthesis fixation and potential wear of the plastic component.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

1. There are "normal" things that may occur after joint replacement that may be alarming to the patient unless he/she is aware of them:
 - a. Numbness around the incision. This may improve or resolve with time.
 - b. Swelling after activity or exercise. This typically also resolves with time
 - c. Slight warmth around the hip or knee. This usually persists for up to one year, as part of the healing.
 - d. Palpable sutures under the skin that are not usually noticed until after the swelling goes down. These often resolve spontaneously, but occasionally need to be removed in the office.



**291 North Fireweed
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-6454**

www.kenaipeninsulaortho.com

- e. For knee replacements, there is often a clicking sensation for the first few months after surgery; it may be permanent, but less noticeable with time.
2. There are a number of worrisome things that can occur during the recovery that may be abnormal, and the physician should be notified immediately:
 - a. Increasing pain, swelling or redness around the surgical incision, new drainage, fever greater than 101 degrees F. These symptoms may indicate infection and can occur immediately after surgery, or many months or years after.
 - b. Calf swelling or pain, or increasing ankle swelling. This may indicate a blood clot.
 - c. Bleeding gums or blood in the urine or stool. This may indicate that the blood is “too thin”.