

Traveling After Joint Replacement Surgery



When am I safe to travel after my joint replacement?

You may be worried about traveling in the first months following surgery. One concern is sitting in a car or airplane seat for long stretches of time and the risk of forming a blood clot in your leg – also known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Several studies have shown that, **if appropriate measures are taken**, it is safe to travel soon after your joint replacement without an increased risk of developing a blood clot for most patients.

If you have a higher than normal risk factors for blood clots, it is important to have a discussion about post-surgery travel plans with your primary care physician and surgeon prior to joint replacement because DVT is a serious condition that can be life threatening. This may potentially affect your surgeon's choice of medication to prevent blood clots after surgery.

Most people will feel safe to travel within a few weeks of surgery; however, keep in mind that your comfort level may also play an important role in determining when you are ready to take a long trip. Anticipate that you may be more sore, stiff or swollen when traveling within a few weeks of surgery. This increase in discomfort will likely be short-lived, but you may experience a slight setback in recovery and should have a plan in place to address any increase in pain. Depending on the progress of your recovery, you may find it easier to use a cane, crutches or a walker (or at least have one available) when traveling even if you were not using them prior to the trip.

What precautions should I take when traveling with my joint replacement?

In general, there is an increased risk of developing a blood clot immediately after surgery whether or not you plan to travel long distance. If appropriate measures are followed, these risks can be minimized and make it possible to travel soon after surgery. These precautions include using **compression stockings**, and/or mobile compression devices and **taking medication** that can range from aspirin to prescription blood thinners to prevent a blood clot. We recommend continuing the use of these preventive methods when traveling. These are other precautions that can be beneficial and are recommended:

- **Walk and move** around frequently. This can consist of basic stretching and getting up to walk the aisle of the plane or stopping the car to walk every one to two hours.
- Do **calf squeezes** and **ankle pumps** to keep the circulation in your legs moving.
- **Pull your knees to your chest** to stretch your legs.
- **Stay well hydrated** by drinking plenty of fluids like water and juice. Avoid dehydrating beverages like coffee and alcohol.



If you are planning to travel after your joint replacement, please discuss this with your surgeon before your surgery so you can both work together in developing a customized plan for a safe journey. More information concerning travel and the risk of blood clot along with the symptoms of DVT and pulmonary embolism can be found on the US Centers for Disease Control website. Also, see the article “Will my artificial joint set off airport security metal detectors?”

References

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