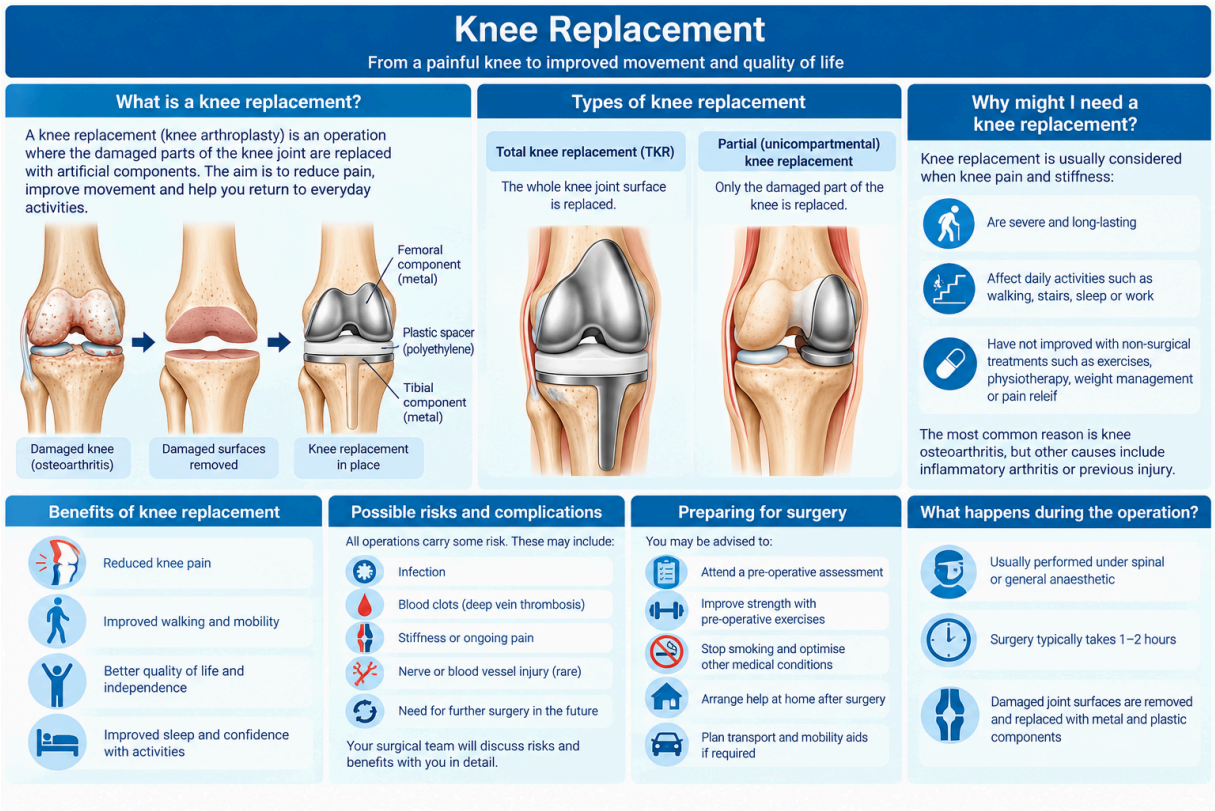
Knee Replacement

Understanding the operation, benefits and recovery

Knee Replacement

A guide to surgery, rehabilitation and recovery



What is a knee replacement?

Knee arthroplasty replaces damaged knee joint surfaces with artificial components to relieve pain and improve mobility.

Types of knee replacement

Total knee replacement treats the whole joint surface. Partial replacement treats only the damaged compartment.

Considering knee replacement

Reasons for surgery, benefits, risks and preparation

Why might surgery be recommended?

Persistent pain and stiffness that affect walking, stairs, sleep or daily life, despite exercise, physiotherapy, weight management or pain relief. Osteoarthritis is the most common reason.

Potential benefits

Less pain, improved walking and mobility, better independence and improved sleep or confidence with everyday activities.

Possible risks and complications

Infection, blood clots, ongoing pain or stiffness, rare nerve or blood vessel injury, and possible future surgery. Your surgical team will explain your individual risks.

Preparing for surgery

Attend your pre-operative assessment; practise advised strengthening exercises; optimise health conditions and stop smoking if applicable. Arrange help at home, transport and mobility aids.

Surgery and rehabilitation

What to expect during the operation and early recovery

Knee replacement exercise examples

Gentle movements to support mobility and strength after surgery

Knee Replacement – Exercise Examples

These exercises help to improve movement, strength and recovery after knee replacement surgery

1 Ankle pumps



- Lie or sit with your legs supported.
- Point your toes away from you, then pull them back towards you.
- Repeat 10–20 times, several times a day.

2 Quad sets (thigh squeezes)



- Lie on your back with your leg straight and a towel under your knee.
- Gently tighten the front of your thigh muscle, pushing the knee down into the towel.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds, then relax.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

3 Straight leg raise



- Lie on your back with one knee bent and the other straight.
- Keep your knee straight and slowly lift your leg to the height of the bent knee.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower slowly.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

4 Heel slides



- Lie on your back with your legs straight.
- Slide the heel of your operated leg towards your bottom, bending the knee.
- Slide back to the start position.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

5 Knee extension stretch



- Sit on a chair with your leg supported.
- Straighten your knee and gently push down.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds, then relax.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

6 Knee flexion stretch



- Sit on a chair.
- Slide your foot back, bending the knee as far as is comfortable.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

7 Standing knee bends



- Stand holding on to a chair for balance.
- Slowly bend your knee, bringing your heel towards your bottom.
- Hold for 3–5 seconds, then lower slowly.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

8 Step ups



- Use a low step with support if needed.
- Step up with your operated leg, then step down slowly.
- Keep your knee aligned over your toes.
- Repeat 8–12 times, each leg.

Exercise safely

- Start gently and build up gradually.
- Keep movements within a comfortable range.
- Stop an exercise if it causes significant increase in pain or swelling.
- Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are most suitable for you.

Exercise safely

Follow your surgical team or physiotherapist's exercise plan.

Move gently within comfort and increase activity gradually.

Stop and seek advice if pain or swelling increases significantly.

Recovery and self-management

Building strength, returning to activities and staying safe

Rehabilitation and recovery

Continue prescribed exercises to regain knee movement, strength and confidence. Swelling and stiffness may persist for weeks. Daily activities often improve over 6–12 weeks; full recovery can take 6–12 months.

Returning to activity

Walking, cycling, swimming and golf are often encouraged when appropriate. Avoid high-impact running and jumping unless your surgical team advises otherwise. Kneeling may be uncomfortable.

When to seek urgent medical help

Contact your healthcare team urgently for worsening wound redness, heat, discharge, fever or calf swelling. Chest pain or sudden breathlessness requires emergency assessment.

Key messages

Keep up your rehabilitation exercises and follow your surgical team's advice. Most people experience meaningful pain relief and improved function.

B-Well Physiotherapy Services

0300 303 4811

bwell.mskberkshire@nhs.net

www.bwellberkshire.co.uk