

The 7 Most Important Questions to Ask Your Knee Surgeon

Knee pain can have a dramatic impact on your quality of life. Knee surgery can remove pain and restore function, but the decision to proceed with knee surgery should be made carefully. Here are 7 questions to ask your knee surgeon before proceeding with surgery.

1. Can You Try Physical Therapy First?

This question is tied in with question two. If there is minimal risk to having knee surgery later, why not try a conservative approach to treating your knee problem now. Some patients may not require knee surgery.

2. What is the risk to not performing surgery now? What could happen if you wait six months? One year?

The question is whether avoiding surgery for 6 months or a year will compromise the long-term outcome. This issue needs to be discussed with your physician. Or the other possibility is that your health status could change, and you might not be able to tolerate a surgery later. All factors should be discussed with your surgeon.

3. What are the alternatives to knee surgery?

A conservative approach to treatment of the knee should be employed whenever possible. As already stated, some patients may not require knee surgery. In addition to physical therapy, anti-inflammatories, injections, and education may be enough to obtain an acceptable recovery. For example, while a knee problem may not heal, the patient may still obtain good long-term function after a period of rehab.

4. What is your expected length of recovery? How many days will you be in the hospital after surgery?

These questions need to be asked so that you can plan your life and manage your expectations. Some of these should be asked right away, and some can be asked at a follow-up appointment. Specifically, you should ask your surgeon or their assistant:

Recovery Sub-Questions:

- a. *How long will you need to follow the knee precautions? Knee precautions are guidelines given to the patient after surgery, and may include such things as how much weight one can place on the knee.*
- b. *Will you need full-time or part-time care? If so, for how long?*
- c. *Will you need a hospital bed at home?*
- d. *How soon will you be able to walk after surgery? Weight bearing status.*
- e. *Will you need crutches or a walker? If so, how long?*
- f. *When can you lie on the operative side?*
- g. *How soon will you be able to climb stairs after surgery?*
- h. *When can you shower after surgery?*
- i. *When can you drive?*
- j. *How soon will I be able to resume normal lifestyle activities besides walking (e.g., work, housework, gardening, etc.)?*
- k. *What are your lifting limits?*
- l. *When is sexual intercourse feasible after surgery?*
- m. *Which sports can you participate in?*
- n. *When can you return to sporting activities?*
- o. *How soon can you resume housework, gardening etc.?*

5. *How many procedures do you perform every year? How many surgeries of this type have you done?*

You should ask your surgeon what they specialize in and how many surgeries of this type they have done yearly and in total. Volume is associated with outcome. Surgeons who perform a procedure more often have lower complication rates and better outcomes than those who do so less often.

6. *What are the risks of complications and what is your complication rate?*

- a. *If possible, you should try to find out the general complication rate for your surgery. You can then compare it to the surgeon's specific complication rate for that surgery.*

7. *If you are going to undergo knee joint replacement surgery, you should ask these specific questions.*

- a. *What is the implant made of? Will you set off metal detectors at the airport?*
- b. *How long will your joint replacement last?*
- c. *What can you do to help keep your joint replacement working as long as possible? (May ask physical therapist)*

- d. What activities or factors could make your joint replacement wear out more quickly. (May ask physical therapist)
- e. Will you need antibiotics for dental care?