

A photograph of a physical therapist, a man with glasses and a grey polo shirt, assisting an older male patient in a blue t-shirt. The therapist is holding the patient's arm, possibly demonstrating a movement or providing support. They are in a bright, modern clinical setting with large windows in the background.

SURGERY & PHYSICAL THERAPY

Many people experience physical therapy for the first time following a surgery, and they usually have a few questions.

The answers to these questions vary from person to person and depend highly on the type of surgery you underwent. Different surgeons also ask their patients to follow their guidelines regarding movement, weight restrictions, length of rehab, etc., and these parameters are usually based on patient outcomes and surgeon preference.

FAQ 1: Do I really need to come to this many weeks of therapy?

Looking at your doctor's directions after surgery may seem a bit daunting. Depending on what surgery you had, your doctor may order anywhere from two weeks to several months of physical therapy. While it may be easy to think that this therapy is optional (technically, we can't **FORCE** you to exercise...) your doctor has very good reasons for ordering this amount of therapy.

Sometimes physical therapy is indicated for a number of week or even months. While it may sound extreme, it's important to complete the entire course of therapy. Your therapist will not only want to improve your range-of motion and increase your strength, but they also want to make sure you can maintain these improvements after leaving their care. **The last few weeks of therapy are just as important as the first.** While we love seeing our patients, we hope that once you leave therapy you won't have to come back with the same problem again. That's why we provide exercises, stretches, and management techniques at discharge to ensure that our patients have the tools to continues living their lives pain free!

Answer: It's in your best interest to come to therapy as directed. Committing to a surgery also means committing to the rehab afterwards.

FAQ 2: Why do I still have all these restrictions? I feel fine.

After surgery, it's easy to feel like you're being "babied" or that you're stuck in a sling or on crutches for what seems like forever. Pain is a great guide; however, once the pain subsides, post-surgical patients can get into trouble. That's why surgeons put restrictions in place to maintain the integrity of the repair while the tissues heal. The body's tissues heal at different rates, so the type of surgery you underwent determines your restrictions.

For example, after a rotator cuff repair, patients are usually released from their sling at around six weeks. **The catch? They have a weight restriction of a pencil, coffee cup, or their car keys.** It can be frustrating, especially for active patients who want to get back to their activities or jobs. However, while you may feel like you can lift that bag of groceries, the muscles fibers are not yet ready to support the weight and you could tear the muscle to the point where it can no longer be repaired.

A total knee replacement, on the other hand, usually does not have very many restrictions due to the nature of the surgery. While your surgeon will want you to avoid things like kneeling or carrying heavy weights in the weeks following the surgery, the surgery primarily leaves the muscles around the joint undamaged. This means that you don't have to wait for the muscles to heal and can just focus on range-of-motion.

While your surgeon definitely doesn't want you to overdo it, they also don't want you to lose all your strength and range-of-motion. That's where physical therapy comes in. PT can help you stretch and exercise safely, following the doctors restrictions and getting you back to your activities faster. It's also a great way to manage any pain or stiffness you may be experiencing after your surgery.

Answer: While they can be frustrating, re-injuring yourself will be even more so. Restrictions are put in place to make sure that you get the most out of your surgery.

FAQ 3: How can you help me now? My surgery was years ago.

It's hard to believe, but therapy can be beneficial **YEARS** after your surgery. Incision scarring and muscle imbalances can cause pain and restriction following a surgery and can all be addressed with physical therapy. These problems can arise months or even years later, and can be exacerbated by your activity level or job.

For example, many surgeons no longer order physical therapy after a total hip replacement due to advancements in the procedure. However, if you have a job that requires more physical activity (i.e. ranching, factory, construction, etc.) a small muscles imbalance could lead to a larger problem, especially when repetitive movements are involved.

Therapy can help to address any restrictions you're having and make sure that you can do what you need to do! Physical therapists can mobilize scar tissue, improve flexibility, reduce pain, and improve strength.