

Guest Column

What you need to know about occupational therapy after a hip or knee replacement

By Dr. William Leone
The Leone Center

Despite its name, occupational therapy (OT) after hip or knee replacement surgery isn't about job skills. Instead, it focuses on helping you regain the ability to perform essential daily activities safely. This is crucial during early recovery. Being able to return to your normal activities is one of the most encouraging signs that your surgery was successful and that you are healing well.

OT and physical therapy (PT) are different but complementary.



OT focuses on helping you regain independence, prevent falls, and manage daily tasks like dressing, bathing, and toileting. PT emphasizes building strength, improving range of motion, and increasing overall mobility. In home health care, occupational therapists visit your home to provide solutions for everyday living challenges.

Creating a safe environment

Most patients after having a hip or knee replacement are discharged from the hospital the same day or the day after surgery with prescriptions for home-based OT and PT. During the first visit, your occupational therapist will assess your strength, mobility, and balance, and make

safety recommendations. They may suggest using a shower chair, raised toilet seat, safety rails, night lights, and removing area rugs or trip hazards. They will also teach you to properly use a wheelchair, walker, or cane if needed. Most patients do not require these aids long-term after healing.

Getting dressed after surgery


Simple tasks like getting dressed can be challenging right after surgery. These difficulties are temporary and improve each day. If you have a hip replacement, you may need to avoid certain leg positions until the tissues around your new hip heal; if you have a knee replacement, bending your knee may be difficult

at first. Occupational therapists often recommend assistive devices like sock aids, reachers, and long-handled shoehorns to help you dress more easily and safely, while avoiding excessive bending.

Shower and tub safety

There is nothing like a shower and washing your hair to make someone feel good. I encourage my patients to shower when they get home. Stepping into and out of a slippery shower or tub can be risky during recovery. Your occupational therapist will show you the safest methods for bathing, such as using a shower stool or hand-held showerhead for

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**“Even the gods
love jokes.”**
~ Plato ~

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