HOSPITAL FOR SPECIAL SURGERY

Alejandro González Della Valle, MD
Orthopaedic Surgeon - Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery
535 East 70th Street, New York, NY 10021
Tel: +1 212 774 7124 Fax: +1 212 774 7505

INSTRUCTIONS TO PREVENT / TREAT EARLY LIMITED MOBILITY OF YOUR KNEE REPLACEMENT

Stiffness can rarely develop following a knee replacement. This means that the mobility of your knee is not enough to perform regular activities like walking, negotiating stairs, sitting down, standing up, or reaching your foot comfortably. You can have difficulty straightening your knee (loss of extension), bending your knee (loss of flexion), or both. In addition, stiffness can be painful.

The early healing process following surgery involves the formation of scar tissue around the knee replacement parts. The formation of a regular amount of loose scar tissue is normal. However, a few patients can develop a thick, fibrous scar that can limit mobility of your knee (arthrofibrosis). The development of arthrofibrosis depends of multiple factors and can be exacerbated by insufficient exercising of your knee after surgery.

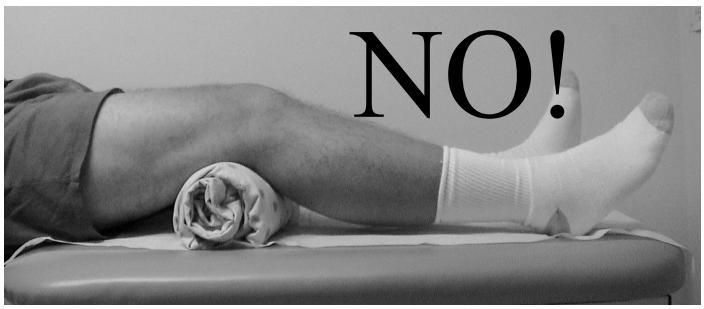
The period in which you can gain range of motion following surgery is limited. During the first 3 to 4 months you will gain most of the mobility in your new knee. Therefore, it is paramount that you exercise conscientiously and enthusiastically now, to achieve the best possible result. For patients who develop stiffness after this early period, the treatment is more difficult and less effective.

At this point, the mobility of your knee is limited as I discussed during your visit. I would recommend that you follow my physical therapy instructions and that you exercise consistently while you are at home.

Adequate pain control is important for you to exercise comfortably and re-gain the mobility of your stiff knee. Pain control can be obtained by the use of the prescribed pain medication and by frequently icing the knee. I recommend that you take pain medication one hour before physical therapy and after that as needed according to my instructions.

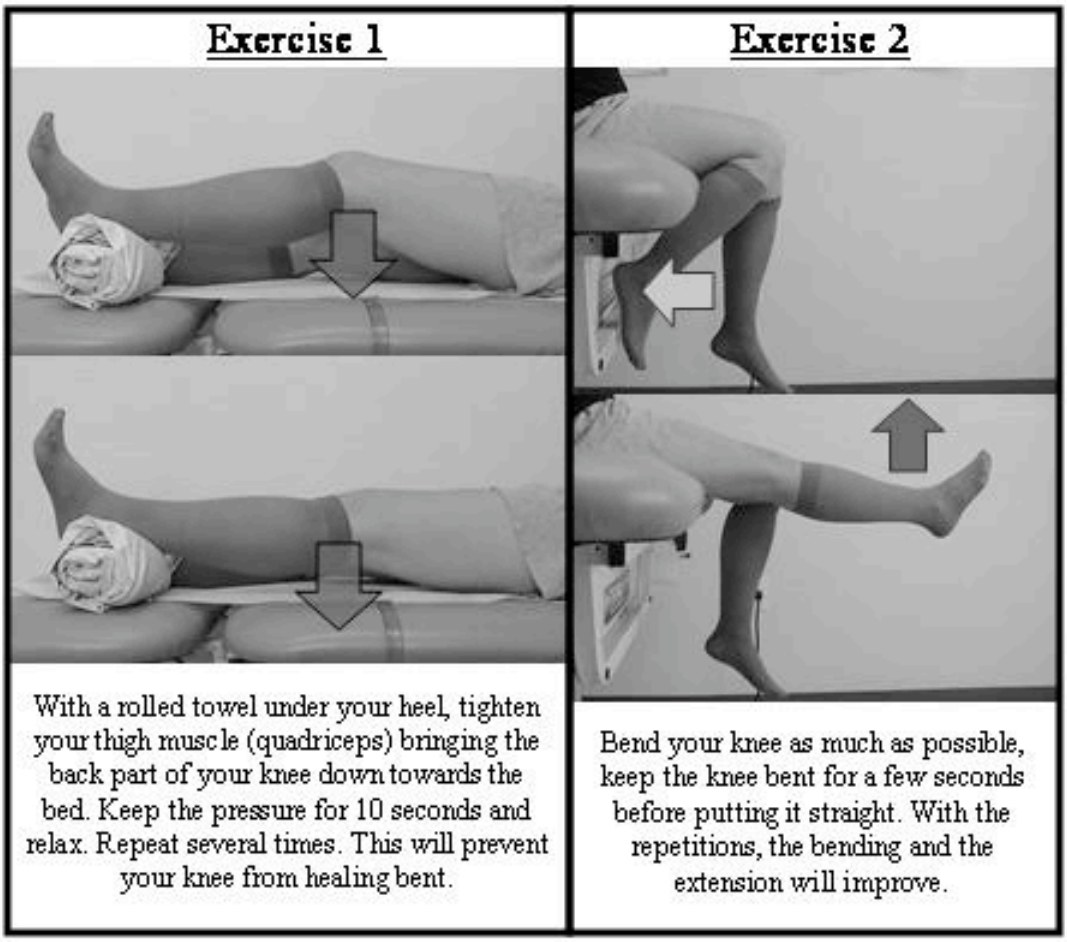
Please follow these instructions during the next weeks:

1. Avoid keeping your knee bent while you are in bed: Do not place a pillow under your knee, and avoid resting with your knee on the side. Keep your feet pointing up. A knee that is slightly bent will hurt less but will heal bent.





2. The following exercises will increase the flexion and extension of your knee. Practice several repetitions at home and with your physical therapist. Some pain is expected and does not mean that you are damaging your operation. You are stretching and breaking the bands of thick scar tissue that are forming in your knee.



I would like to learn about your progress. Please, call me and have your physical therapist call me in two weeks. I would like to learn about your progress and the range of motion that you achieved after following these instructions (please ask your physical therapist to measure the range of motion of your knee with a goniometer). If the range of motion is not acceptable, you may require a manipulation of your knee replacement under anesthesia (breaking the scar tissue by gently manipulating your knee while you are under anesthesia).

Alejandro González Della Valle, MD
Orthopaedic Surgeon - Hospital for Special Surgery
Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery - Weill Medical College of Cornell University