Advice for patients: non weight bearing following leg surgery

Your consultant may have told you that you will need to be non weight bearing on your operated leg following your surgery. This means that it is important you put no weight down through your affected leg whilst it is trying to heal. The length of time you need to be non weight bearing can vary from between two – six weeks. This will have an effect on your daily activities and can be very tiring, so it’s a good idea to plan ahead as you will need some support at home.

Stairs

Following your surgery your physiotherapist will assess you for an appropriate mobility aid, such as crutches or a frame and will then teach you how to hop. They will teach you how to climb stairs, but if you have difficulty with this your physiotherapist will teach you how to go up and down safely on your bottom. This can be harder than you think. So if you have a toilet downstairs it may be easier to have your bed downstairs. Or it may necessary to hire a commode, but think about who is going to empty it.

Wheelchairs

Some patients who already have mobility problems may not be able to manage to hop so will have to use a wheelchair to get around. They will be taught how to transfer from the chair to bed, or toilet by the physiotherapist. In this case it will be necessary to check the width of the doors around the house and to assess if there is enough space in the toilet. It is best if you have a wheelchair with an adjustable foot rest that will keep your leg elevated.

A wheelchair is also useful to get you out of the house and for when you attend your outpatient appointments.

Sitting to standing

It can be very difficult to get from sitting to standing and vice versa from low chairs or toilets. If possible, sit in a chair with arms. You can raise the chair by placing extra cushions on the seat. It may also be useful to hire a toilet frame and raised toilet seat.

Washing and dressing

It is important that the cast and dressing do not get wet. (You can pick up a leaflet in clinic for a waterproof cast cover if you require one). It is possible to shower in a walk-in shower by sitting on a plastic stool, or over the bath by sitting on a bath board if you are wearing a waterproof cast cover.
You will have difficulty standing whilst washing therefore, can you sit on the toilet and reach the sink, or if there enough room, a small chair/ stool to sit on, to conserve energy. Wet wipes are useful for cleaning toes.

Do make sure someone else is in the house before you take a shower or bath as these areas can be slippery and you might fall. Do not lock the door in case assistance is required. If there is no one available it would be safer to have a strip wash.

Loose, comfortable clothing is best. Remember trousers have to go over the cast. It is important that you wear a flat sturdy shoe on the un-operated foot.

**Swelling**

Swelling is quite common. So in order to reduce swelling for the first two weeks following surgery, elevate your operated foot higher than your heart, unless your surgeon has stated otherwise. If you have previous or existing problems with your hips or back, elevate to just above your groin. You can get up for five to ten minutes every hour whilst you are awake, to do any necessary tasks e.g. making a cup of tea, go to the toilet.

You must wiggle your toes up and down at regular intervals as this will increase blood flow and aid circulation. Also, move your hips and knees regularly to prevent them getting stiff. It is normal to have some bruising post surgery.

**Please contact a member of your team or your GP if you experience increasing swelling in your toes, pins and needles or numbness. If out of hours then ring 111 or attend a walk in centre.**

**Safety**

It is essential to take extra care when using crutches or a frame. Remove any loose mats and clear any clutter before your operation. It may also be necessary to rearrange any furniture – that easily can be - to provide more room to move. Be aware of any hazards such as pets, slippery floors or cables. Also watch out for uneven surfaces and inadequate lighting.

Regularly check to make sure the rubber ends on the crutches are not worn out or clogged with dirt. If you have any problems with your crutches please ask a friend or relative to take the damaged ones to their nearest physiotherapy department for exchange.

**If you live alone**

It is best, if possible, for you to stay with someone or for someone to stay with you whilst you regain your confidence and increase your mobility. Tasks such as housework, shopping or looking after pets are going to be very difficult. If this is not an option, for those who are for elective surgery you should consider cooking extra meals now and stocking up your freezer. If you have access to the internet, think about internet shopping and home delivery.
Ask friends, family and neighbours to help with looking after your pet(s), housework and providing transport on discharge from hospital and bringing you in for outpatient appointments. A small rucksack is useful for carrying things around the house and a thermos flask to carry your drinks.

**Equipment**

It is possible to borrow most of the equipment mentioned above from your local Red Cross on a short term loan, for a small fee or donation. Or you may be assessed by an occupational therapist whilst you are in hospital to assess your needs for any equipment.

**Contact details for your local Red Cross**
- Cambridge 01223 868696
- Bury St Edmunds 01284 727252
- Huntingdon 01480 453629
- Ely 01353 664147
- Newmarket 01638 663671
- Bedford 01234 268850
- Bushey 01923 804283
- Colchester 07885 807480

**Team contact details**
- Orthopaedic nurse practitioner hotline 01223 596183
- Clinic 1 appointments 01223 216231
- Plaster room 01223 217772
- Ward physiotherapist 01223 216104
- Ward occupational therapist 01223 216880
- Ward C8 01223 217279
- Ward D8 01223 217282

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We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

**Other formats:**

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team:

patient.info@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

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**Document history**

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