

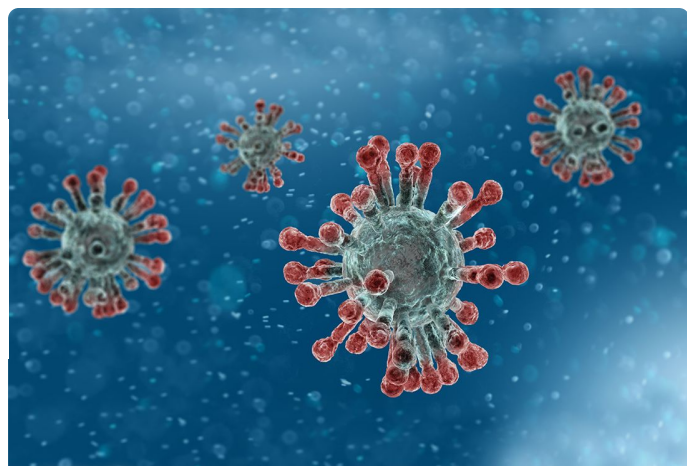
TREATMENT

What to Do If Your Orthopaedic Surgery Is Postponed

The COVID-19 pandemic has required that the country take protective measures to prevent the spread of the disease. To this end, many hospitals have postponed elective surgeries to help ensure that their resources are available for severely ill patients who may need them.

An elective surgery is a procedure that is done for a medical condition that is not urgent or life-threatening. Many orthopaedic procedures fall into this category. While an orthopaedic condition may be painful or limit function, it is usually not life-threatening and surgery can be safely postponed.

Many hospitals are postponing elective surgeries to prepare for a spike in coronavirus cases.



A delay in your surgery may be disappointing. You may have already asked for time off from work for the procedure or arranged for a friend or family member to help during your recovery at home. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unexpected national emergency and you may be asked to postpone your procedure until the crisis is under control.

What can you do in the meantime? In many cases, there are some simple nonsurgical treatments that can help alleviate painful symptoms until your surgery can be rescheduled.

Orthopaedic Conditions and Nonsurgical Treatments

Listed below are several common orthopaedic problems, along with some frequently recommended nonsurgical treatments. If you are already doing some of these treatments, you can continue on with them until your rescheduled surgery. If not, be sure to check with your surgeon to ensure that they are appropriate for your specific situation.

Arthritis

You may be waiting to have joint replacement surgery on your hip, knee, shoulder, or ankle. More than likely this is due to painful arthritis in the affected joint.

Until your surgery can be rescheduled, the following treatments may be helpful:

- Changing your activities to avoid doing things that cause painful symptoms
- Using nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to control pain and swelling
- Applying either ice or heat to the affected joint, depending on which is more comfortable for you

In certain situations, an injection of a corticosteroid into the joint can help relieve pain until your surgery can be rescheduled.

If you are suffering from arthritis in your hip or knee, try to limit walking and avoid stairs as much as possible. If you have a painful shoulder, avoid heavy overhead lifting.

In addition, it is always important to exercise as this can preserve range of motion in the affected joint.

Read more: [Arthritis: An Overview](/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-an-overview/) and [Total Joint Replacement](/en/treatment/total-joint-replacement/)

Sports Injuries

If you are awaiting surgery for a sports injury—such as a labral tear in the shoulder or an anterior cruciate ligament tear in the knee—exercise or physical therapy can help you maintain range of motion and strength in the affected joint.

If your knee is unstable, you should avoid activities that involve pivoting, jumping or rapidly changing direction, as these actions might cause your knee to give out and result in a fall. If you have a meniscus tear in your knee and plan to have arthroscopic surgery, use of a knee support or knee brace and anti-inflammatory medication may help alleviate your symptoms until the procedure can be done.

Read more: [Anterior Cruciate Ligament \(ACL\) Injuries](/en/diseases--conditions/anterior-cruciate-ligament-acl-injuries/) and [Meniscus Tears](/en/diseases--conditions/meniscus-tears/)

Spine Problems

Even though you may be in pain, spinal surgery can often be delayed. Nonsurgical treatment consists of rest and avoiding activities that could make your pain worse—such as bending or lifting. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and pain medication or muscle relaxants can often help to lessen your symptoms until your surgery can be rescheduled.

If you have been on an exercise or conditioning program, you may wish to continue. You should notify your doctor, however, if you experience neurologic changes such as weakness or numbness in your arms or legs.

Read more: [Herniated Disk in the Lower Back](#)

(/en/diseases--conditions/herniated-disk-in-the-lower-back/)

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Symptoms from carpal tunnel syndrome can often be quite painful. If your surgery is postponed, you may get relief from wearing a wrist splint at night and from taking anti-inflammatory medication. Your doctor may also be able to give you a corticosteroid injection to the carpal canal. This may relieve symptoms for a short time until your surgery can be rescheduled.

Read more: [Carpal Tunnel Syndrome](#)

(/en/diseases--conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/)

Emergency Surgery

Most hospitals will allow procedures that need to be done on an emergency or urgent basis to go forward. Emergency or urgent orthopaedic procedures may include:

- Fractures in which the pieces of bone are out of place
- Tendon ruptures
- Open wounds
- Infections
- Bone tumors
- Disk herniations in the spine that cause a loss of feeling or movement in a limb

Some of these conditions require that surgery be done right away, others within a few days.

Your orthopaedic surgeon can advise you as to the best timing of any emergency procedure.

Communication

If you have any questions or problems during the pandemic, it is important to maintain communication with your surgeon. Often, a simple telephone call may be enough to help you get by if you have a routine orthopaedic problem or until you can have your rescheduled surgery.

In addition, many surgeons now offer the option of a video teleconference during which you can speak to your surgeon face-to-face, describe your symptoms, and ask questions. In some cases, this may allow you to show a picture or live-stream of a problem—such as a swollen joint or an open wound—to your doctor.



Video teleconferencing allows a patient to have a virtual visit with his or her orthopaedic surgeon.

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Your orthopaedic surgeon will do all he or she can to help treat your orthopaedic problems during the pandemic.

If you experience non-orthopaedic problems that could be related to a viral illness, such as fever, vomiting, dehydration, or shortness of breath, contact your regular physician immediately.

For more information

The Centers for Disease Control has created a helpful website to provide patients and healthcare professionals with the most recent updates about COVID-19: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)\(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html)

In addition, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has created a hub where member surgeons can easily access a wide range of relevant and credible COVID-19 resources and information: [COVID-19: AAOS Member Resource Center](https://www.aaos.org/about/covid-19-information-for-our-members/) (<https://www.aaos.org/about/covid-19-information-for-our-members/>).

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Contributed and/or Updated by

[Stuart J. Fischer, MD, FAAOS](#)

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