



JOINT REPLACEMENT SURGERY

Technology, options, and when it's right for you

By Kent Samuelson, MD

There's a lot to think about when you're trying to decide if you should have your hip or knee replaced. Your lifestyle, overall health, and activity level are important factors in making a decision about major surgery, not to mention the expert diagnosis of a physician through a physical exam and X-rays.

Seeing a specialist who's trained in total joint replacement is the best place to start if you're having trouble with a knee or hip. Receiving the proper diagnosis helps determine whether a patient can be treated with medication, physical therapy, or even simple activity modification.

Implanting a new joint is just part of the solution: patients must also follow a proper rehabilitation plan, have surgery at a hospital that specializes in this kind of procedure, keep up on important exercises, and avoid activities that can injure or cause pain to the new joint.

Total Joint Technology

Artificial joints haven't changed dramatically over the years, but the techniques for implanting those joints have. That means patients are healing faster than ever.

Patients are now able to receive regional rather than general anesthesia, nerve blocks are used to control pain, rehab efforts begin within hours of surgery, and many patients are walking the day of their surgery. Less-invasive surgical techniques all make for better outcomes and healthier patients. Combine that with specialized facilities, and you end up with a highly-skilled team approach to joint replacement that has patients home from surgery as soon as they can get in and out of bed on their own power.

Patients also benefit from simple things like pre-operative education classes, specialized operating rooms that decrease the risk of infection, on-site physical therapy services, pain management, and a carefully trained nursing staff dedicated to caring for patients who have had a joint replaced.

Prevention

Prevention is a difficult topic when it comes to total joint replacement of the hip or knee. Often much of the damage in the joint is either genetic or comes from an injury that occurred years ago.

One thing you can do to decrease the need for joint surgery is weight control; it can make a big difference in the wear and tear on your joints. Extra weight means more stress on joints, especially the knees. Keeping the pounds off and exercising can help reduce the need for surgery and keep your joints healthier over time.

Osteoarthritis is the leading reason for joint replacement. When the cartilage is worn away, so that bones are touching in the joint, nothing but replacing the joint will bring relief. Cartilage can be worn away by past injuries, arthritis or other inflammatory joint problems, infections, or anatomical anomalies.

When is it time to see a joint surgeon?

When the pain is beginning to change your activities or the quality of your life—when you'd rather stay in bed than work around your house or yard, or play with your children or grandchildren—it's time to see a surgeon to discuss your options.

Most joint damage can be seen on X-ray. An expert joint surgeon will be able to provide an accurate diagnosis from X-rays and a short physical exam of the damaged joint. The good news is that a variety of options exists, and you have time to consider them. Joint replacement isn't typically a medical emergency; it's something you can spend some time thinking about, or trying other options before pursuing.

One benefit of new joint technology is this: total joints last longer now than ever before, which means getting a new joint earlier in life is a good option for returning to an active, healthy lifestyle.

Joint pain doesn't have to keep you from living. The Intermountain Medical Group offers comprehensive total joint care—from diagnosis to pre-operative education and rehabilitation classes to expert surgeons performing joint replacements. If you have joint pain, there's a way to help you get back to living life.

To make an appointment with a joint surgeon near you, we invite you to visit the index at the back of this publication or intermountainmedicalgroup.org.



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