

# Articles by our Physical Therapists

## 3. Regain Your Youthfulness with a Joint Replacement

### Regain Your Youthfulness with a Joint Replacement

For over 45 years joint replacements have been the surgical option for severely arthritic joints. Joint replacement surgery is becoming more common with the active, aging community. Hip and knee joint replacements remain the most common form of surgical intervention. Approximately 773,000 Americans have a knee or hip replacement each year. Joint replacements have advanced to include ankles, shoulders, elbows, and wrists.

Total Knee Replacement (TKR), also called knee arthroplasty, is one of the most successful elective surgeries performed today. There are two main contributing factors when deciding on a joint replacement: functional level and pain level. The severity of arthritic changes is not always the determining factor. Pain associated with arthritic changes is based solely on the individual. Consult with an orthopedic surgeon to determine the degree of joint damage and whether you would be a good candidate for surgery.

After the replacement the real work begins. Patients usually remain in the hospital for 2 to 4 days with a total knee replacement. Typically, a knee replacement patient will begin outpatient physical therapy 5-7 days following the surgery. Treatment sessions will be 2-3 times a week for 1-3 months depending on the progress with rehabilitation. There are many questions that arise prior to beginning physical therapy. These questions include;

- How come I feel the same knee pain after surgery?
  - ◆ Typically patients are frustrated with the persistent knee pain following surgery. Although this pain feels like the arthritic pain prior to surgery it will resolve as the swelling improves and the muscles are lengthened to fit the new knee. Considerable drop in the pain can be observed in the first month following surgery.
- Will I be able to hunt and hike again?
  - ◆ Once recovery is complete, usually 2-4 months, hiking and hunting may be resumed with minimal difficulties. Most orthopedic surgeons will agree once the replacement is healed it is stronger than bone.
- How come the side of the knee is numb?
  - ◆ Tiny superficial nerves are cut during the surgery, which create a numb feeling on the side of the knee. This may or may not return to normal, but it does not effect the performance of the knee.
- With what do they replace the knee?
  - ◆ Replacements include portions made from metal, such as stainless steel, titanium, or chrome and cobalt alloys. Other portions are made of a strong, durable plastic called polyethylene. Some new implants are made of a ceramic material.
- What is the difference between partial and total knee replacement?
  - ◆ When the cartilage in one of the knee compartments has become damaged, surgeons may be able to replace just the damaged section of the joint. This procedure is called a partial knee replacement.
- When will the knee replacement feel like part of my body?
  - ◆ The knee is fully functional in 2-4 months, but it may take up to a year to feel normal.
- How far will the knee bend after surgery?
  - ◆ Traditional total knee replacements achieve 120 degrees of flexion or bend. New types of replacements allow the knee to bend up to 155 degrees.

Please consult a physical therapist regarding any other questions about post-knee replacement rehabilitation.

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