

BONING UP ON ORTHOPEDICS

RESTARTING LIFE – WITH FREEDOM FROM JOINT PAIN

SPECIAL TO LIFE AFTER 50



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AS WE GO THROUGH LIFE, OUR BODIES WORK HARD TO HELP US LEAD FULFILLING LIVES. UNFORTUNATELY FOR MANY OF US, AS TIME GOES ON, OUR BONES AND JOINTS SEEM TO BETRAY OUR HEARTS AND MINDS. THINGS BEGIN TO WEAR OUT. ALL TOO OFTEN, OUR HIPS, KNEES, SHOULDERS AND ANKLES BEGIN TO STIFFEN UP, SWELL, LOCK AND POP, AND GENERALLY CAUSE US TO FEEL MISERY WHILE PERFORMING THE VERY TASKS THAT ARE OTHERWISE ENJOYABLE.

Perhaps the reason is due to an old injury, or a familial tendency. Perhaps it's due to wear and tear from osteoarthritis, or an inflammatory disease such as rheumatoid arthritis. These things can occur at any age. The most unfortunate experience this in their 40s and 50s, if not younger. Some live to a ripe old age before the joints go bad. Then there are some who never have significant joint deterioration, even if they live to over 100 years.

Historically, for the vast bulk of human history, such problems resulted in a progression toward a more sedentary existence and eventually to complete immobility. Fortunately, with modern knowledge and technology, such a fate can be avoided and we have the ability for afflicted individuals to “restart” their lives. Since the middle and later parts of the last century, joint replacement surgery has been successfully employed to radically improve the productivity and well-being of millions of people. And things continue to improve!

INNOVATIONS IN JOINT REPLACEMENT

Thanks to technological advancements, prosthetic joints are now manufactured with new metal alloys,

plastics and ceramics that have superior wear characteristics. There is less friction and overall better durability. Bone cement is better and is used more judiciously. Implant designs have improved, which leads to improved range of motion, better durability and fewer complications such as dislocations. Although there can be no guarantee as to how long any given implant will last, it is expected that the newer implants will endure for 20-or-30-plus years. For these reasons, it is now standard that more and more patients in their 50s and younger are choosing joint replacement surgery.

It's not only the technology that continues to improve. There are advancements in medical care including surgical protocols – pre-op, intra-op, and post-op pain management, and rehab programs have resulted in drastically reduced pain, reduced complications such as stiffness and infection, and shorter hospital stays. Just a few years ago, patients would rank their post-operative pain at an average of seven-to-eight-out-of-10. The length of hospitalization would be upwards of a week. Today, the average pain score is two-to-three-out-of-10, with an average length of hospital stay of

less than three-days, and 80-percent of patients are discharged to home.

Anecdotally, one of my patients had her second knee replacement after having had the other one done 10-years previously. Both were done by me. The patient was astounded at how much easier the recent surgery was. Despite being 10-years older the recovery was much quicker, post-op pain was profoundly less and post-op nausea was nonexistent.

OTHER OPTIONS

Just because joint replacement is easier and more successful than ever, it needs to be stressed that surgery is typically not the first line of treatment for joint pain. In fact, it should be one of the last options you explore, and only if other treatments aren't working. Joint replacement surgery is a serious decision, and should be weighted carefully.

Surgery is to be considered only when other treatments have failed or will not be successful. Other options may include medications such as ibuprofen, aspirin or naproxen. Injections can help lessen joint pain as well. Physical therapy can help. Sometimes

a slight change in lifestyle can make all the difference. Just taking it a bit easier on rigorous workouts, while still exercising your joints regularly, can help reduce joint pain.

In fact, believe it or not, the best way to keep your joints healthy is to use them. Though genetics is a major factor in the development of arthritis, your lifestyle and how you take care of your joints plays a big part. Just like your brain, exercising your joints regularly will keep them healthy. Whatever physical activity you enjoy, even if it's as mild as taking a walk around the block, make sure you do it often. Be sure to keep the intensity of the activity within the reasonable limits of your body. Keep in mind that there is a difference between keeping your joints active and putting them through stress or even abuse. Make sure you are good to your joints, and your joints will be good to you.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

If you and your physician have tried to treat your joint pain and you are still finding your quality of life being limited, joint replacement could be the answer. However, there are still many things to consider, such as: