

Hip Happy

Total Hip Replacement

Do you struggle to walk far, or find that if you sit for too long, or try to squat down or bend over, you experience pain in your hip/s? Maybe it's progressed further than that, and you rely on a walking aid to move around?

Possibly you've tried some treatments already, like physical therapy, but if the bone damage is too advanced, the treatments tend to have little or no effect.

Pain can be very debilitating (and depressing) especially when coming from the hip, as your hip is involved in nearly all the movements you make.

Total hip replacement (or hip arthroplasty) may be something you have already discussed with a health care professional. It is a technique that has become widespread in recent years in response to the need for improving hip joints that have been damaged by injury or arthritis.

Joint replacement surgery may offer the best treatment option for long-term improvement for the hip joint, when other treatments have proven inadequate. In a majority of cases, having a total hip replacement reduces joint pain and means a return to pain-free movement, and generally the sooner you have the surgery, the better the outcome.

Fundamentals

Hip pain can be caused by a variety of factors, including:

- An injury that does not heal properly
- A chronic illness
- Normal wear and tear from years of constant use
- Severe arthritic conditions, especially osteoarthritis
- Injuries as a result of trauma, such as a hip fracture or dislocation caused by a fall.



WHO HAS HIP REPLACEMENT SURGERY?

Generally, the older you get, the greater your chance of needing a hip replacement, regardless of gender.

For example, someone over the age of 70 has a 9 times higher chance of having a hip replacement than someone aged 55. Like age, the greater your weight, the greater your chance of needing surgery. The heavier you are the more strain you place on your hip joint, contributing significantly to developing osteoarthritis, which ultimately increases your risk of needing a hip replacement.

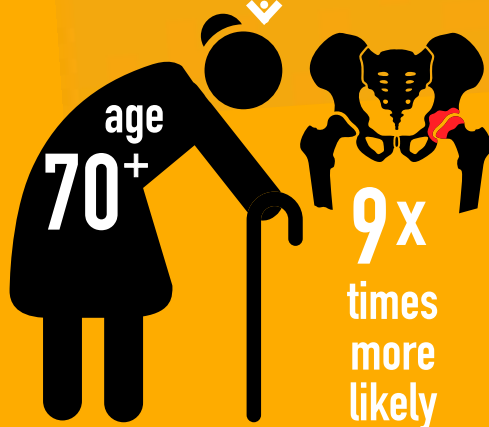
More and more patients are having the procedure done at a younger age. Nearly a third of hip replacements are done on patients under the age of 65. This is probably due to the fact that the science of making prosthetic (artificial) hips has advanced over the years and many 'new' hips will now last over 15 years and up to 25 years. In addition, recovery has progressed and with intensive rehabilitation you can be back up and 'running' (well walking) within the same day or the next day after surgery. Most people can resume normal routine activities within the first 3 to 6 weeks of their total hip replacement.

You are never 'too old' for surgery. Although the risk of surgery in general is greater, the older you are, the research has shown that elderly and

frail patients get better results from having a hip replacement following a fall, than simply a repair of a hip fracture. If there is a risk of falling due to pain and lack of mobility in your hips – it's likely to be better to have a hip replacement before you have an accident. Sadly the statistics are not good for experiencing an adverse medical event after a high fracture, and there is a significant risk of death within 6 months following a hip fracture. Hip replacement surgery has been proven to improve survival rates in elderly patients.

WHY HAVE A HIP REPLACEMENT WHEN THERE MAY BE RISKS WITH SURGERY?

As with any procedure, you and your surgeon will discuss the risks versus the benefits. Surgery



is a good option for people whose pain is causing disability, impacting on their ability to work, do chores, or play sport – essentially impacting on quality of life. Relief from pain is the greatest benefit and the major reason for surgery. The procedure, followed by rehabilitation, will also improve movement, strength and coordination of your body and leg. You will be able to walk, climb stairs and maintain an active lifestyle in much greater comfort as well as be able to return to activities you enjoy – possibly swimming, cycling, tennis or golf.

There may be a number of reasons why you would delay surgery, but it has been shown that the longer the hip pain is present and the weaker your leg muscles become, the harder and slower your recovery is. So, acting quickly, and staying as active as you can before surgery will be hugely beneficial to your outcomes.

It is only natural to be scared, or have concerns about surgery, however the risks can be reduced with adequate preparation. Before surgery, consulting a physical therapist and improving the strength of your hip and leg muscles (and your arms for using crutches) can go a long way in helping your recovery after surgery. Also reducing your body weight before surgery will reduce the risk of developing a clot post-surgery as well as making it much easier to get up and mobilise. The more knowledge you have and preparation you put in, like practicing specific exercises and using crutches – before surgery, the easier and less daunting the rehabilitation will be.

Having the physical therapist ‘yank’ you out of bed on the same day or early the next day after surgery is probably not what you will want, but studies have shown that the sooner you become mobile the lower (and significantly lower) your risk of developing a clot or suffering an adverse medical event. It also speeds up your time to returning home, as discharge strongly depends on being able to walk and climb stairs safely. Again reducing your time

spent in hospital will lessen your chance of picking up an infection.

HOW CAN REHABILITATION HELP YOU?

Surgery may be the most important and intense step in any treatment plan, but it is not the only one that carries particular risks.

The recovery period following any joint replacement surgery usually involves many important steps

and processes that will determine your long-term health and mobility. The ultimate success of the surgery, will be determined by the success of the recovery process.

Your physical therapist will teach you all the precautions and the dos and don’ts for your new hip. These ‘rules’ help to ensure the longevity of your hip and avoid any damage or dislocation of the new joint. Avoiding any further trauma would be wise as it only delays your recovery, and could require surgical repair, which will set you back and expose you to more risks.

Following months, or maybe years, of suffering from pain and disability due to hip problems, you have probably developed ways to hold your leg, or angle it to reduce pain or load, possibly a limp when walking or favouring the good side for certain activities. Pain and loss of ‘normal’ movement patterns can lead to muscles and ligaments becoming weak, wasting away and others becoming tight from lack of use or sustaining wrong positions.

Getting a prosthetic hip may repair the bony structures, but what about the muscles and soft tissues above, below and around the joint, that also need to work together for optimal pain-free function? That is where rehabilitation is so important. If you don’t retrain your body, you will continue with bad habits and possibly

develop pain in your knee, back or the other hip, and you may still end up walking with a persist limp. The lifespan of your prosthetic hip depends on it moving in the correct fashion which depends on the supporting muscles, so this is a key role of rehabilitation.

Your physical therapist will guide you right from the first day after surgery in walking and climbing stairs correctly, teaching you basic strengthening and circulation exercises to do in bed. From there they will progress your exercises as you become stronger and more confident, while also monitoring your pain.

Once light activity becomes possible, it’s important to incorporate healthy exercise into your recovery programme. Recommended activities will include gradually increasing your walking and light household activities, to swimming or cycling, using an elliptical trainer at a gym for example. Movement is essential to a healthy recovery.

Commitment to a rehabilitation programme is an important part of the recovery process, the more effort you put in, the more benefits you’ll get back. Depending on your ability and determination you may be able to do more home exercises alone, whilst others may require more one-on-one sessions with the physical therapist. Things that may help to keep you motivated might include group exercise classes run by your therapist, or walking with a friend, using a step counter or a diary to monitor progress. There are ways to stay in touch and motivated over the months following surgery and it is important you connect with your physical therapist about this, otherwise you may find yourself plateauing after a few weeks and becoming despondent.

Hip replacement surgery really can give you a new lease of life, and allow you to return to most of the activities you loved, not to mention ensure your own independence. It may seem daunting, but with the correct preparation, counselling with your doctor and physical therapist and a prior commitment to your rehabilitation, you can be back on your own two feet in no time.

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