



Recent Advances in Total Joint Replacements

By Ron Romanelli, M.D.
Orthopedic Center of Illinois

Total hip and total knee replacements are the most frequently performed adult reconstructive procedures in the U.S. In 2005 over 285,000 hip replacements were performed with an estimated 572,000 in 2030. Knee replacements totaled over 523,000 and are expected to exceed 3.4 million by 2030.

The most common symptom associated with the need for a joint replacement are pain at night, a painful arthritic joint that does not respond to medication, and limited range of motion associated with pain. There are also deformities associated with limb length inequality that can cause pain and problems.

Total joint replacements can provide pain relief, correct a deformity, restore movement, and provide a stable joint to allow for weight bearing activities.

Treatments

The methods used to treat arthritis include non-steroidal medications and injections of Synvisc or Hyalgan (similar to WD-40 lubricating agent) to relieve pain. Joint cartilage transplantation and the transfer of human cartilage from one area of the joint to another are other alternatives.

Some of the new surgical treatments give immediate surgical stability to allow patients the ability to begin post-operative weight bearing exercises immediately after total knees, total hips and some revision surgeries. Patients who begin range of motion exercises earlier can help prevent blood clots and weakness. The goal is to restore function, movement and strength as soon as possible.

An exciting development in hip replacement surgery is the use of modular hip replacements. Modular hip replacements allow physicians to choose components that match the patient's own anatomy. For example, hip replacement length and position can be changed by using different size balls and neck lengths to adjust leg length.

Technology is constantly improving the quality of the metals and the plastic inserts so patients can have longer success with their hip, knee or shoulder replacements.

Joint replacements improve quality of life, help keep patients active, which may prevent osteoporosis, and promote independence. Most importantly, joint replacements can relieve the pain associated with arthritis.