



The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging's

Older Person's Guide to Joint Replacement

Nearly 700,000 Americans have hip or knee joint replacement surgery every year.

And that number is expected to rise dramatically in the coming decades as the nation's Baby Boomers reach retirement age.

Knee and hip replacement can ease pain and improve movement and function in joints damaged by disease or injury. The surgery—in which damaged or diseased parts of the joint are replaced with metal or plastic substitutes—has a very high success rate. That said, there are some risks. A small percentage of people who have the surgery, for example, develop joint infections. And recovery after surgery takes several weeks. Healthcare staff, however, take steps to prevent complications and speed recovery. And patients who prep for surgery and follow through with physical therapy afterward can further boost their odds of a good outcome.

If you're considering joint replacement surgery, here's what the experts with the American Geriatrics Society's Foundation for Health in Aging (FHA) suggest:

Ask yourself some questions If you have joint pain but can keep it under control with small lifestyle changes, by taking a pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), or with physical therapy, you may not need surgery. If, on the other hand, you answer “yes” to the following questions, you may benefit from joint replacement surgery:

- Does joint pain make it hard for you to sleep?
- Is the pain keeping you from doing things you want to do, like visit friends, or travel?
- Do everyday activities, such as standing from a sitting position, or walking up stairs, hurt?

Discuss your symptoms and your options with your healthcare provider If your provider thinks you might benefit from joint replacement surgery he or she will refer you to an orthopedic surgeon who does hip and knee replacement surgery.

Learn more about surgery Among other things, the surgeon and his or her staff will describe the surgery, benefits you can expect based on your age and health, and risks. Don't be shy about asking ques-

tions. Make sure you understand what the surgery involves, how you should prepare for it, what kind of anesthesia you might need, how long you're likely to be in the hospital, what kind of physical therapy you should get afterward, what your pain management options are, and how long recovery is likely to take.

Ask about less invasive surgery Minimally invasive hip replacement surgery involves fewer and smaller incisions than traditional surgery. Minimally invasive knee replacement surgery involves a smaller cut than the traditional procedure. Patients who have less invasive surgery usually have shorter hospital stays and shorter recoveries. In general, people who are healthier, in better shape, and younger are more likely to be candidates for this surgery than those who are sicker and older. Ask your healthcare provider if you might be a candidate.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medications you're taking Don't forget over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs and other remedies. You may need to stop taking certain medications or supplements before and after surgery. If so, your healthcare provider may recommend substitutes.

Do you smoke? Ask your healthcare provider how to cut down or quit before surgery Among other things, smoking can slow healing and recovery after surgery. Talk to your healthcare provider about strategies and programs that can help you quit. In one study, patients who stopped smoking six to eight weeks before knee or hip replacement surgery had half the rate of complications of those who didn't quit.

Exercise Ask your healthcare provider to recommend safe and appropriate exercises that can help you get in shape for and recover more quickly after surgery. Stretching, aerobic and strength training exercises can all be helpful. Among other things, doing exercises that strengthen your arms and upper body before surgery can make it easier to use a walker or crutches during recovery. Research suggests that exercising can also speed the healing of wounds in older people. If movement is painful, water exercises in a warm swimming pool are often a good bet. Many YMCAs now offer water exercise classes.

Eat right Some older adults don't get enough protein, and essential vitamins and minerals in their diets. To boost the odds of a better outcome from surgery, your healthcare provider may suggest that you take nutritional supplements before and after surgery or see a dietician.

Try to lose excess weight Some surgeons require patients who weigh more than 300 pounds to lose weight before surgery, since obesity can lengthen recovery. Exercising and eating right can help you slim down if necessary.

Make arrangements for recovery Healthy older patients may be able to go home from the hospital four or five days after surgery. Plan ahead for your recovery by arranging to have a friend or relative stay with

you and help with meals, bathing, dressing and other activities for the first few days.

If you're 70 or older, have several health problems, or live alone and can't arrange to have someone stay with and help you after surgery, your healthcare providers may recommend "inpatient rehabilitation" in a rehabilitation facility. If you have a choice among facilities, choose one that offers physical therapy every day and has staff with expertise in joint surgery rehabilitation.

Before you're discharged—from the hospital or rehabilitation facility—make sure you know which medications you need to take, at what doses, and when. And make sure you understand what kind of physical therapy you'll continue to need, for how long, and where and when to get it.

Make physical therapy your top priority Following through with recommended physical therapy is absolutely essential. Patients who do so are less likely to have pain and complications during recovery than those who don't. They also tend to be able to walk sooner.

Get more information about knee and hip replacement surgery from:

The FHA's "Aging in the Know" Web site, http://www.healthinaging.org/agingintheknow/chapters_ch_trial.asp?ch=40.

The Arthritis Foundation Web site, www.arthritis.org

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons Web site, www.AAOS.org

The American Association of Knee and Hip Surgeons' Web site, www.aahks.org



Foundation for Health in Aging

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The Foundation for Health in Aging builds a bridge between the research and practice of geriatrics health care professionals and the public. The Foundation advocates on behalf of older adults and their special needs through public education, clinical research, and public policy.

The American Geriatrics Society is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of older adults. With a membership of over 6,000 health care professionals, the AGS has a long history of improving the health care of older adults.