

Total Hip Replacement

The hip joint is a simple ball-and-socket joint consisting of the top end of the thigh bone joined to the pelvic bone. It's lined by cartilage, and surrounded by a capsule, ligaments, and muscles. The hip joint is the largest weight-bearing joint in the body.

Unfortunately, as a person gets older, it's not unusual for the hip joint to become diseased, resulting in pain, stiffness, and loss of motion. While in many cases, these symptoms can be treated by exercising or by modifying certain activities, sometimes medication is necessary, and sometimes using a cane can also help. In some cases, the symptoms may be severe enough to require hip replacement surgery.

Total hip replacement surgery was pioneered in the early 1960s in Europe, and has been performed in the United States for almost 30 years. The surgery, itself, is done by an orthopedic surgeon and is intended for patients with hip disease that either significantly impairs their activity or causes pain that is difficult to control. It is a reliable and safe procedure that has a greater than 90 percent success rate. More than 200,000 of these operations are done every year in the United States. Generally, an artificial hip will last for 10 to 20 years.

The operation consists of replacing the ball at the top end of the thigh bone with a metal piece which has a rod inserted into the inside space of the thigh bone. The other end of the artificial hip is a metal piece lined with plastic, which replaces the socket on the pelvic bone. The metal surfaces of the artificial hip may be secured to the patient's bone by using bone cement or by other methods. The decision whether or not to use cement is generally made by the surgeon on an individual basis. Factors affecting this decision include the patient's age, gender, fitness, and level of activity.

Almost immediately after the surgery, you will be able to walk with some assistance. These first few steps will be the beginning of the rehabilitation process, which generally takes three to six months. During this time, you will receive guidance and assistance from a physical therapist, sometimes in a group with other people who are also recovering. During your rehabilitation, you will also need to follow a daily home exercise program to ensure the best recovery possible.

After the rehabilitation period, you will need to keep your muscles strong and stay physically active. Having hip replacement surgery does not mean that you'll be confined to the rocking chair. In fact, to ensure that you'll be happy with your new hip 10 to 20 years down the line means that you'll need to maintain the kind of active lifestyle just mentioned.

As with all major surgery, in addition to the risks of anesthesia, a total hip replacement carries certain risks, such as bleeding, infection, blood clots, joint dislocation, and loosening of the attachments. While major complications are not common, they do occur and can be very serious. The decision to choose total hip replacement surgery should be carefully considered. Discuss any concerns you may have with your surgeon prior to the operation and call if you have any problems or concerns after the operation.

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- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
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This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.