Orthopaedic Connection

One Or Both Knee Replacements

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Osteoarthritis or “wear and tear” arthritis of the knees is caused by many factors. It is not my purpose in this article to try to explain the causes.

Knee arthritis however is one of the most common reasons that patients come to the office. In most cases it just “seems to happen” and patients are often unsure of when they began to have symptoms.

Sometimes the arthritis symptoms are only in one knee. But lots of times both knees are affected. Usually one knee is worse.

After the standard medical history, physical exam and plain standing x-rays we have a pretty good idea of what is going on.

Treatment

I like to think of treatment like a menu. Why? Because it is the correct way to do things and my patients and families appreciate it.

There are almost always options of treatment. To present no options is like a waiter coming up to the table (no menu presented) and saying we have a New York strip steak. You say gee I wanted a chicken salad. Waiter says come back when you want a New York strip. It’s the same as the surgeon saying you need one (or two) total knee replacements. Come back when you want surgery. No options.

I don’t try to talk patients out of surgery if nothing else will help, but mostly people would like to try other options before total knee replacement which is always the last resort. It comes to the top of the menu only after other options have not provided relief.

Surgery

Well if we have gotten to the stage where the patient feels surgery is inevitable and they have two bad knees a decision needs to be made.

Having both knees done at the same surgery “to get it over with” is tempting to some patients. It is technically possible to do it, but most Orthopaedic Surgeons (including me) do not encourage it. Most surgeons encourage staged knee replacements.

Knee replacement is designed to provide pain relief and improved function not to make your knee feel like it is 20 again.

One At A Time

It is also referred to as staged knee replacement. The second operation can be done as soon as 6 – 10 weeks after the first.

- Less stress on heart, lungs, kidneys
- Less blood loss and need of transfusion
- Easier rehab process, less challenging
- Shorter hospital stay

Both

There is a somewhat higher rate of complications and need for blood transfusion.
If there is a consideration to do both total knee replacements at the same time certain criteria must be met for most surgeons.

- Under age 70
- Normal body weight
- No diabetes, heart, lung or renal disease
- No depression
- Very well motivated
- Healthy with low risk of complications

In either case the majority of patients experience less pain, improvement of function and quality of life. The best results are in patients who are committed to the somewhat difficult rehab process and have a very positive outlook.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

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Good health, good life, all the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush