

Hip Replacement and Alternatives

Brightside, October, 2013

By Dr. Derek Conte

Total Hip Replacement (THR) is the replacement of the ball and socket portions of the hip joint with plastic, metal or ceramic parts which resist wear and tear. The intention is to relieve pain and increase joint function, giving the patient a chance at a fuller life. If conservative care doesn't improve symptoms or function, hip replacement may be considered (the success rate is stated to be about 90% and last 10-15 years) even with its significant risks.

If your hip is "killing you" and you can't run, jog or even walk without pain anymore; can't go up the stairs or enjoy life nearly as much, it's time to do something! It is my experience when co-managing patients with orthopedic and neurosurgeons, that they really try to avoid surgery unless other avenues have been completely exhausted. But let's say you've already run the gamut of alternatives to surgery and you're ready to take the big step. There are a few things you should know:

1) Anterior vs. Posterior vs. Anterolateral approaches: An anterior approach (from the front of the hip) leaves much less tissue damage and blood loss in its wake, allowing shorter recovery time and a smaller incision than the posterior approach. The anterolateral approach allows for better leg length symmetry and less chance of dislocation later. Ask your surgeon.

2) Metal allergies / tests for sensitivity: If you listen to TV commercials, you'll notice law firms that are conducting class-action law suits due to unexpected reactions to, or rejections of, the implant material used in THR procedures. Before you choose your material you should have a blood test to determine your sensitivity to commonly used materials. I have had patients take this test and discovered they reacted unfavorably to one material but were fine with another. One is back in Italy now, doing fine with her hip replacement years later. This is a little-known test so please feel free to call or have your surgeon call me for the details on how to get the test done.

3) Stem cell injections: While theoretically exciting, with the promise of universal regeneration and zero tissue rejection, this therapy is still being developed. Yet there are companies selling stem cell treatments for \$30,000 per shot. Please consult with your surgeon first!

Though total hip replacement may be the best course for some, there are conservative treatments for hip pain that may help delay, or even avoid radical surgery, such as Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Massage, foot orthotics, nutritional enhancement and exercise (these are best done in combination). I think it is important that a person explore alternatives to surgery. As an example, a patient was considering joint replacements in BOTH legs seven years ago and started chiropractic care at that time. She still gets adjusted monthly, almost never complains of joint pain and hasn't had the need for the surgery. While this case may seem extraordinary, it is possible to have such favorable outcomes. The possibilities are only limited by Nature, the doctor's skill, and the patient's own innate ability to heal.

Dr. Derek Conte is co-founder of Chiropractic Specialists on Concord Rd. in Smyrna. Questions? Call 404-784-6008. For past articles, testimonials, photos and FAQ's, go to drderekconte.com