

When to Recommend Total Joint Replacement

I have heard countless patients who have undergone successful **total hip or knee replacement** exclaim that they wish that they had undertaken the procedure earlier in the course of their disease. Does this mean that we as physicians should recommend this procedure more fervently to our patients who have arthritis? The answer to this question is variable, and each case should be approached individually with several factors in mind.

Not all patients who have arthritis have reached the clinical and/or radiographic stage in the disease where they meet established criteria to qualify for **total hip or knee replacement**. What this means is that there are often effective treatments to control their arthritic symptoms that carry less risk than a replacement arthroplasty. A rare patient in this category will try to be insistent on receiving an arthroplasty wanting to just “get on with” what they feel like is ultimately going to be required. Usually a thoughtful discussion with these patients will help them to see the rationale for a graduated approach to treatment directed at providing symptom relief with the least invasive yet effective treatment.

Other patients with severe arthritis languish in fear of **total hip or knee replacement** based on misinformation, or on an anecdotal account of a complication experienced by a friend or family member. In these cases it is most prudent to help the patient understand what is generally to be accomplished by a replacement, giving statistical measures of both success rates and complication rates. It is always well to allow the patient to continue on a nonoperative course until they are confident that they have overcome their fears, and have gained confidence in the idea of this surgical approach.

In those patients who meet established criteria for **total hip or knee replacement** and who are anxious to proceed with surgery it is best to assure that they are adequately educated on the benefits and risks of the procedure. After such, if their enthusiasm for the procedure is maintained then the surgery should be undertaken.

Those patients who need **total hip or total knee replacement**, who have been well educated on the procedure, and are certain in their own minds that it is the course they wish to take will generally be the most satisfied with their decision and accepting of their outcome.