

Orthopaedic Connection

Arthritis of the Hip - Treatment

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In this part of our discussion about arthritis of the hip we are going to discuss non-surgical treatment. We will get to surgical treatment in next week's class. It is important to do it in this way because conservative treatment is always considered first in our office in evaluating patients with hip arthritis. You don't have to worry that surgery is the only item on the menu in our restaurant. There are almost always choices (or at least there should be). It really bugs me when a patient in the office says "he told me to come back for surgery when I couldn't stand the pain". You have just seen a surgeon who only wants to do surgery.

Although there is no known cure for arthritis of the hip, customized treatment for the individual patient can reduce pain, maintain and improve joint mobility and limit functional disability.

Education of the arthritis patient and family members is an integral part of the treatment plan. Patients must participate in self management programs. Patients who take part in these programs have a decrease in pain, increase in physical activity and overall improvement in quality of life.

Physical therapists and occupational therapists play a crucial role in management of these patients. A physical therapist assesses muscle strength, joint stability and mobility. The therapist recommends the use of modalities and instructs patients in an exercise program to maintain and improve joint range of motion and muscle strength and if necessary provides assistive devices to improve walking. Incidentally, the cane is used in the hand opposite the affected hip. This reduces stress on the bad hip joint and usually decreases pain.

Exercise is King

Exercise is extremely effective in relieving pain and preserving hip function. This varies of course to some degree depending on what the therapist feels is best for the individual patient. Therapy usually includes use of a stationary bicycle or Nu-step exercise machine.

The treatment program supervised by the therapist is usually twelve weeks in length. Home exercises done religiously are an essential ingredient in any physical therapy supervised program.

Aquatic Therapy

Aquatic physical therapy for patients who are fortunate enough to have it available to them, is a great benefit. Everything seems to improve with aquatic therapy. It is added to the standard therapy program and is not used instead of regular therapy.

These therapy techniques are said to help patients by modifying hip joint biomechanics. I think that means we really are not sure why it works, but it does and that is all that is important!

Medication

Your family doctor or internal medicine doctor knows all the appropriate anti-inflammatory medications that are available that could help you.

They also know how they may interact with other medications you are taking. One person should be in charge of your medication if at all possible. It is a very important segment of treatment that needs to be carefully evaluated. I as a surgeon always defer to the family physician/internist when patients ask me to prescribe for them.

Management of hip arthritis is a serious and complicated problem. I feel as the surgeon I need to be part of the decision making process. When a surgeon says "come back to see me when you can't stand the pain", the surgeon functions only as a technician. I feel I have much more to offer the patient than that.

A team approach of family physician/internist, physical therapist and myself as the surgeon is the ideal situation. I am in the best position to decide when the patient needs a hip replacement. The decision for surgery is always made taking into consideration the wishes of the patient and their family.

Next time I will discuss all you need to know about total hip replacement.

For additional accurate information about arthritis of the hip log on to our office teaching website for patients and families at www.orthopodsurgeon.com which also can lead you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush