

Orthopaedic Connection

How Old Is Too Old?

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Hardly a week passes that one of my office patients who really needs a joint replacement says, "I'm too old to have a knee (or hip) replacement surgery."

I have never felt it was my job to "sell" or persuade patients to have surgery that I do.

Rather it is my responsibility to educate the patient and family about what is possible. I imagine that is what "Transforming patient information into patient understanding" is all about. I am an educator as well as an Orthopaedic Surgeon. Each patient and family is unique and has different needs.

Age A Barrier?

As Orthopaedic Surgeons have gained increased experience with joint replacements over the years there is a growing philosophy; Age is not a barrier to joint replacement. It may be a barrier in the patient's mind. Therefore I have to discuss that with the patient.

With advances in Orthopaedic Surgery, anesthesia, pain management and physical therapy, nearly anyone who is healthy enough is a candidate for a new hip, knee or shoulder regardless of age.

It is fairly standard nowadays to be doing joint replacements on patients in their 80's. And I have done an occasional patient in their 90's who is so miserable they are willing to take a chance for relief of their pain.

The Clearance

As I hope you realize, I don't just take someone who is older and go right ahead with surgery.

The whole program of scheduling a joint replacement is a process. First, a mutually agreeable date is chosen. Then my office begins to set up whatever appointments are needed to prepare for surgery.

Clearance is done by the patient's personal physician or if needed, an internist I choose.

I need the personal physician or internist to evaluate the patient, do whatever lab tests they choose - essentially to optimize the person's health before surgery.

Any kind of overall general health improvement that you can do in the time prior to surgery will improve the outcome.

Bottom Line

Don't think because you are a certain age that you can't have it done. There is no certain age you can't have it done. There is no

ceiling that says absolutely after this age surgery should not be performed.

The Risks

The odds of complications from any joint replacement increase with age, and older adults don't handle complications as well as our younger patients. What cardiologists call cardiac reserve diminishes with each year even if you are in relatively good health. Risk of complications after surgery increase if you have -

- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- anemia
- if you smoke
- if you had a blood clot before
- excessive weight
- COPD (breathing difficulty)

Much More

This is taking longer than I thought. I would appreciate if we can "reassemble" next week for more about "How Old Is Too Old". See you then.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I sincerely hope all of our loyal readers will take advantage of an endless amount of musculoskeletal information. It is easy! Log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com.

It gives access to all Website articles, Your Orthopaedic Connection and every GCH article from most recent to the first. Full text! It covers everything I do in the office and hospital.

Good Health. Good life. All the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush