

Why Can't A Total Knee Be Like A Total Hip?

I think by now you know that I like to have some continuity in the articles I write for you. To hop scotch around from one topic or area of the body to another seems to me to be kind of disjointed (not a pun!) and I want to keep readers interested and maybe even looking forward to the next article! So that's why I do what I do.

We have recently written about knee trouble not always needing surgery and knee trouble not always needing an MRI for diagnosis.

This time I'd like to talk about why many total knee replacements don't work out as well as total hips. Have you noticed this? Not that all of you have total knees or hips. Some do, I'm sure and I hope you are happy as a clam with yours.

As a group, total hip patients are much more satisfied with their outcome than total knee patients. If you are unaware of this you haven't talked to many joint replacement patients.

What I'm telling you is how it is in all orthopaedic offices not just mine.

Why do hip replacements as a group do so much better?

I think it is directly the result of the hip joint having much simpler anatomy than the knee. It is a ball and socket joint buried deep in the pelvis with lots of large muscle groups surrounding and protecting it. Its motion as a ball and socket is simpler than the knee. By its location it is very stable and has less stress on it. Much less.

Maybe that is why our knees wear out and need replacement about 7 times more often than hips.

The hip was chosen by Dr. John Charnley in England in the 1960's to be the first joint replaced. Eventually they worked out the problems of what the best materials should be and the procedure spread to Europe and then the rest of the world. My first experience with hip replacement was while I was at the Cleveland Clinic.

Then gradually Orthopaedic Surgeons and biomedical engineers started to experiment with replacement of the knee.

The knee is a completely different joint than the hip in many important ways. It has 3 joint spaces not one and is sort of a flat joint not a deep ball and socket. It is surrounded by ligaments with no muscles covering it. It is out in the middle of the leg and is very easy to bump, twist or injure.

The hip joint space is smaller and more compact. The knee joint is a huge space. The knee is not a hinge, but has a very complicated motion of bending and rotation that is hard to reproduce exactly in total joint surgery.

Dr. Charnley was wise in choosing the hip first to replace as he might have given up in despair if he had attempted the knee replacement first!

Please don't get the wrong idea. I am well satisfied with the excellent LCS total knee prosthesis I have used for many years and the results are equal to anyone else who does total knees.

I am pointing out the general differences in how total hip patients do as a group compared with total knees.

Knee problems or any Orthopaedic Surgery condition can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at Lakeview Community Wellness Center.

Future Clinic date are Friday, April 4, April 18 and May 2, 2008.

Please call 989-463-6092 to schedule an appointment.

Dr. Haverbush