

Getting Back in the Game after a Joint Replacement

Just how much athletic activity following joint replacement surgery is too much?

While many patients who undergo a hip or knee replacement may wish to return to athletic activity after surgery they should know that they may be taking a risk with their new joints. A review of the latest data on athletic activity after joint replacement found that despite their wishes, patients generally reduce athletic activity after joint replacement.

Joint replacement is considered by many to be one of the most successful medical innovations of the 20th century. This is particularly true of total hip replacement originated by Dr. John Charnley in England in the 1960's.

Hip and knee replacement operations, which are increasing in frequency, predictably relieve pain and improve function in patients with arthritic joints.

Pain relief has been and continues to be the primary reason patients consider joint replacement.

However as the "Boomer" generation ages, improved joint function is becoming a more frequent motivator for patients undergoing joint replacement.

"Baby Boomers" often want to be able to keep up the same level of sporting activity that they enjoyed in the past after joint replacement.

However, there are still questions within the Orthopaedic community concerning the degree at which athletic activity is safe after a hip or knee replacement. It has been determined that patients who participate in strenuous athletic activity after a joint replacement have:

- * Increase stress placed on the reconstructed joint causing the new joint to wear out more quickly. This might be caused by activities such as running, tennis or basketball.

- * Increase wear to the artificial material such as metal, plastic, or ceramic which comprise the new joint. Athletic activity can cause small particles to get loose within the joint. These particles can cause fluid build up and pain.

* Increase stress where the implant is attached. This results in inflammation and fluid build up. It can cause the artificial components to come loose, and revision operation may be necessary.

Furthermore, implant wear has been shown to be related to how much the joint is used as opposed to length of time the joint has been in place. It is still not clear how much athletic activity should be reasonably allowed or recommended following total joint arthroplasty. The orthopaedic literature regarding sports and total joint replacement is not extensive.

We need to keep in mind that surgeons and patients often assess the success of a joint replacement differently. Surgeons look at pain, function and survivorship and whether the patient needs revision, while patients consider their pain and activity. If the joint allows them to play their favorite sport without pain they may not be concerned about needing an additional surgery in the future.

Patients who choose to play sports after joint replacement should train for their sport, build up back, hip and knee strength, and be aware of potential risks of athletic activity after joint replacement.

All Orthopaedic Surgery problems including hip and knee problems can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at the Lakeview Community Wellness Center in Lakeview or at the office in Alma at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan.

Please call 989-463-6092 for information or to schedule an appointment.

Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center Clinic dates are November 14 and November 21, 2008

Please don't forget there is a wealth of accurate information about all the Orthopaedic conditions I treat on the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. Please log on and check it out.

We are happy to answer questions from readers. You can e-mail me at orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com or write to me at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan 48801.

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

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush