

A Baltimore Sun Q and A with Dr. Brian Mulliken regarding Knee and Hip Replacement

Expert advice

For some people, simply jogging or playing a friendly game of tennis comes with reminders of the passage of time: creaking knees and aching hips. Although these symptoms often can be treated with rest, therapy and medication, nearly 500,000 Americans each year receive knee replacements, says Dr. Brian Mulliken, a joint replacement specialist at St. Joseph Medical Center/Orthopaedic Associates. Another 300,000 people receive hip replacements. And, as the population ages, that number grows annually.

What causes the need for a joint replacement?

The most common cause of hip or knee replacements is arthritis -- and arthritis is usually a wear-and-tear process. The knee is the most commonly replaced joint, followed by the hip. And that's followed by shoulder, ankle and even smaller joints.

- **For more information about joint replacements go to:**
 - > **The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons**
 - > **The American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons**
 - > **The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases**

When should patients consider a joint replacement?

When they have pain and limitations of their activity that can't be controlled by nonsurgical treatments -- typically anti-inflammatory medicines, injections, therapy and activity modification.

How many joint replacements do you typically complete each year?

About 450 to 500.

What are the components of replacement joints?

Almost all replacement joints have a metal component and a hard plastic component (called polyethylene). The two metals commonly used are chromium-

cobalt and titanium.

What do you tell your patients about the surgery?

I tell patients it is still a major surgery, that the surgery itself is routine, the recovery is predictable, and it is rewarding in the end. Typically, the recovery period is six to eight weeks.

Recently there has been a lot of discussion about gender-specific joint replacements. What does this mean?

Knee replacements come in different sizes and shapes, and we decide at surgery what size and shape is appropriate for each patient. ... There really is no such thing as a [gender-specific] knee replacement.

Do more men or more women get joint replacements, and if there is a difference, why?

More women get knees replaced than men, and the numbers are almost equal for hips. It's not entirely clear why more women get knee replacements, but probably it's in part genetically based.

How can people take care of their joints and avoid having a joint replacement?

Keep your weight down. Keep your activity up. And take nutritional supplements like glucosamine and chondroitin. They are potentially joint protective, but it's debatable. The data is mixed. Still, they may help you. ... I take them. I'm one of those younger people who have a bad hip joint and, to me, it's a no-brainer to take them.

Reporter, Holly Selby