

Happy Trails *for* Hiker

...AFTER ROTATING KNEE REPLACEMENT

If people tell John Hatch to, “Take a hike,” he is more than happy to—especially because he can. Two years ago, the avid hiker, who leads major Boy Scout expeditions and gives lessons at REI, had trouble even walking from his house to his mailbox. The problem was an old college lacrosse injury that worsened over the years. “His knee joint was unstable and very arthritic,” says his orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Brian Mulliken, whom John’s wife found through extensive Internet research.

Mobility with a twist

“There are different types of knee replacements. My philosophy is to tailor the choice of the replacement to the patient’s lifestyle,” explains Mulliken, who advised Hatch on a rotating platform knee replacement (also known as a mobile bearing knee) that provides back and forth, plus twisting, mobility.

“I reserve the Press Fit rotating platform for generally younger, more active patients. It does not need cement, instead the patient’s bone grows into the replacement, which may provide



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DR. BRIAN MULLIKEN

better function and longevity. John needed this because his hiking is very demanding.”

However, Mulliken adds that most patients are very happy to choose the fixed bearing knee replacement.

Hatch, age 64, has hiked in New Mexico and Utah since receiving his new knee. “It’s as if I have my own natural knee. Dr. Mulliken has been fantastic,” he says.

Knee replacement is a “resurfacing operation,” says Mulliken, who is with St. Joseph’s Orthopaedic Institute. “The arthritic joint is removed and replaced with a metal and hard plastic implant.” Previously, the average lifespan of a replacement has been up to 15 years, but Mulliken projects that, thanks to better materials and techniques, today’s implants will last much longer.

No pain, lots of gain

Another advancement is post-surgical pain relief. Patients need not worry about pain or rehabilitation. “We use an injection of customized pain medication before surgery is complete, so that patients wake up feeling comfortable,” says Mulliken. “The Orthopaedic Institute nurses and rehabilitation staff at St. Joseph are excellent.” Following a three-day stay in the state-of-the-art Orthopaedic Unit, patients receive six to eight weeks of outpatient rehabilitation. Hatch achieved the maximum flexibility for his new knee—135 degrees.

Knee replacements are becoming more common as Americans live longer and strive to stay healthy. Mulliken cites one study that projects a seven-fold increase in knee replacements by the year 2030. “Before the age of joint replacements, a lot of people with arthritis became inactive and just wouldn’t leave their homes,” he says.

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John Hatch



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