

Ask the doctor:

What's new regarding joint replacement surgery?

Joint replacement surgeries have improved dramatically in recent years, with patients now experiencing substantial pain reduction and improvements in quality of life after these surgeries. Lincoln orthopedic surgeon Matthew Byington, DO, answers some common questions about joint replacement and describes new advances.

Q: What types of joint replacements are most common?

We most commonly see patients needing knee, hip or shoulder replacement and less commonly, ankle or elbow replacement.

Q: Why do people need joint replacements?

Pain is the most common problem. The region where our bones connect to each other is the joint. Within the joint, cartilage acts as a protective cap at the end of each bone, and the cartilage surfaces glide over one another as the joint moves. Cartilage is like a set of brake pads on your car — just as brake pads can wear down to the rotors, cartilage can wear down to bone. This leaves two hard boney surfaces grinding against one another, often causing severe, debilitating pain. In addition to reducing patients' life quality and ability to function, this severe, debilitating pain also can cause people to feel depressed.

Joint replacement surgeries significantly relieve patients' pain and so can improve function and their quality of life.

That's why these surgeries are associated with



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among the highest levels of patient satisfaction in all of medicine.

Q: Do certain lifestyles or ages make one more of a candidate?

Not necessarily. We see patients from a wide variety of lifestyles, shapes and sizes, who vary in age anywhere from the 40s through the 90s. As we age, cartilage in our joints can break down and become worn out. While we can't reverse time or aging, we can control some things to reduce risk for joint problems.

These include getting regular exercise and eating a nutritious, balanced diet. Both of these contribute to a third important thing: staying at a healthy weight. People who are overweight and don't watch their diets or exercise are at greater risk for joint problems. Fortunately, replacing unhealthy joints can really improve overall health because when patients have less pain, they can get out and lead the active lifestyles we all aim for.

Q: Which lifestyles or other factors are contraindications to joint replacement?

Age is just a number, right? We have many patients in their 80s and 90s who are healthier than some patients in their 50s and 60s. By examination and looking at our patients' medical histories, we determine whether joint replacement is safe for the patient.

For example, patients with severe diabetes or who have cardiac or respiratory problems may not be candidates for surgery.

All patients go through careful pre-operative testing with their primary care providers and sometimes other specialists, such as cardiologists or nephrologists, to find out whether surgery is safe for them.

Q: How has joint replacement surgery changed over the years?

Both the procedures and patients' experience have changed dramatically. In the 1970s and 1980s, patients were hospitalized for up to two weeks after knee or

hip replacements. Now, because of improved implant designs, surgical techniques, anesthesia and patient care, patients are staying only one to two days. Some patients even go home the same day after certain types of joint replacements, if their doctor says it's safe to do so.

We're going to see more same-day replacements in the future, as this can save money and improve patient satisfaction.

Q: Are all services regarding joint replacement available in Lincoln, or would one go elsewhere for some surgeries?

I've worked throughout the United States during my medical training and practice and can say without hesitancy that Lincoln is very lucky to have a comprehensive, competent and very cohesive medical community. The orthopedic surgeons in Lincoln are among the best in the country, and because of this, less than 1 percent of patients needing joint replacement must be referred outside our community.

Q: Would you tell us a little about your background, and where you went to medical school?

I was born and raised in Lincoln and graduated from Nebraska Wesleyan University. I received my medical degree from Northwestern University in Chicago and completed my orthopedic surgery residency at Michigan State University at Lansing. I am board certified in orthopedic surgery with advanced training in sports medicine and arthroscopic surgery, and I specialize in treating patients who have sports-related injuries, as well as knee, shoulder, hip and elbow conditions.

My partners at Prairie Orthopaedic & Plastic Surgery — orthopedic surgeon Pat Hurlbut, MD, plastic and reconstructive surgeon Gustavo Machado, MD, and podiatrist Kara Krejci, DPM — and I are proud to serve the Lincoln community. Our focus is treating patients' musculoskeletal and orthopedic problems to improve their quality of life and ability to function and to alleviate their pain.

My wife, Amberly, and I moved back to Lincoln in 2017 and have three children: Adalyn, 6, Finn, 3, and AVALY, 1. Amberly has her doctorate of physical therapy and practices here in Lincoln at Complete Physical Therapy.

Amberly and I love raising our family here and particularly being active with our kids outdoors. I also stay active by running and playing golf. ■

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