

When is it time for knee replacement surgery?

By Dr. Nam Dinh
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Most people take their knees for granted until it gets too difficult to climb a flight of stairs or go for a walk. Knee pain, usually associated with arthritis, is common among older adults.

But is it time for surgery?

Knee-replacement procedures are among the most common bone surgeries in the U.S., with more than 600,000 performed each year. That number is expected to exceed 3 million by the year 2030, according to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS).

As an orthopedic surgery specialist at Poinciana Medical Center, I frequently see patients who suffer from pain and want information about surgery. Here are the answers to a few of their most commonly asked questions:

Why does my knee hurt?

The knee is the largest joint in the body, made up of a complex array of bones, tendons, ligaments and cartilage. While several factors can lead to pain, most chronic pain is caused by osteoarthritis (age-related wear and tear on the cartilage), rheumatoid arthritis (a disease in which joints become inflamed), or post-traumatic arthritis caused by an injury.

When is it time for a consultation?

Follow your body's cues, and don't ignore lingering pain. If you experience swelling, stiffness or discomfort following everyday activities such as walking or climbing stairs, it's worth getting a checkup. Also, see a doctor if your knee's shape or appearance changes over time.

Is there an alternative to surgery?

Depending on the condition of the knee and

how much pain you are in, there may be an alternative to surgery. Activity modification, weight loss, using a cane or physical therapy are nonsurgical options. Medications such as NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), corticosteroid injections or viscosupplementation injections may also reduce the need for an operation.

If surgery is needed, what should I expect?

The term "knee replacement" is a bit misleading, because your entire joint isn't "replaced." During most surgeries, a surgeon removes the damaged area – usually the cartilage and bone between the thigh bone and the shin bone – and replaces it with an artificial joint made of metal, ceramic or plastic. The knee joint, as the result, is "resurfaced" rather than "replaced." The procedure lasts less than two hours.

How long before I'm back to my normal self?

Most patients are back home the same day or the following day. Total recovery can take between six months to a year. The vast majority of patients – 90 percent, according to the AAOS – experience a reduction in pain after surgery.

Knee-replacement surgery can be life-changing for patients who have experienced extended periods of pain. Once fully recovered, you'll notice activities like swimming, golfing, biking and walking will become much easier... and, best of all, pain-free.

Dr. Nam Dinh is an orthopedic surgeon at Poinciana Medical Center with special training in minimally invasive anterior hip and total knee replacement surgery. To learn more information about Dr. Dinh, search "Dinh" on PoincianaMedicalCenter.com's Find a Doctor page.