

Total Hip Replacement

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This document will give you information about a total hip replacement. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause damage to one or more joints.

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, where there is gradual wear and tear of a joint. Some other types of arthritis are associated with inflammation of the joints. Arthritis eventually wears away the normal cartilage covering the surface of the joint and the bone underneath becomes damaged. This causes pain and stiffness in the joint.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get less pain and be able to walk more easily.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can help control the pain. Supplements to your diet may also help relieve your symptoms. Check with your doctor before you take supplements. Using a walking stick can make walking easier, as can a small shoe-raise.

Regular moderate exercise can help to reduce stiffness in your hip. Physiotherapy may help to strengthen weak muscles.

A steroid injection into your hip joint can sometimes reduce pain and stiffness.

All these measures become less effective if your arthritis gets worse.

What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes an hour to 90 minutes.

Your surgeon will make a cut on the side of your hip and remove the damaged ball and socket. They will insert an artificial joint made of metal, plastic, ceramic, or a combination of these materials (see figure 1).

The implant is fixed onto the bone using acrylic cement or special coatings that bond directly to the bone.

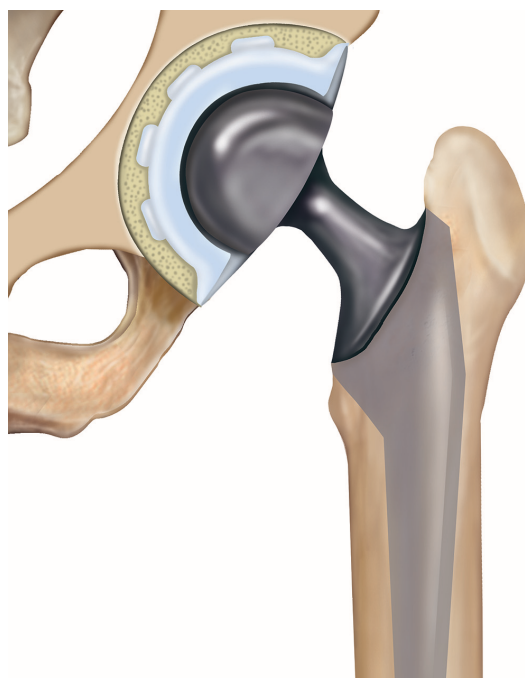


Figure 1

A total hip replacement

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots
- Difficulty passing urine
- Chest infection
- Heart attack
- Stroke

2 Specific complications

- Split in the femur
- Damage to nerves
- Damage to blood vessels
- Infection in your hip
- Loosening
- Bone forming in muscles around your hip replacement
- Dislocation
- Leg length difference

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after three to seven days.

You will need to use crutches or walking sticks for a few weeks.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery, have less pain, and can move about better. An artificial hip never feels quite the same as a normal hip and it is important to look after it in the long term. A hip replacement can wear out with time.

Summary

If you have severe pain, stiffness and disability, a hip replacement should reduce your pain and help you to walk more easily.

Acknowledgements

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