

Hip Replacement Surgery - Preventing Post Op Complications

Introduction

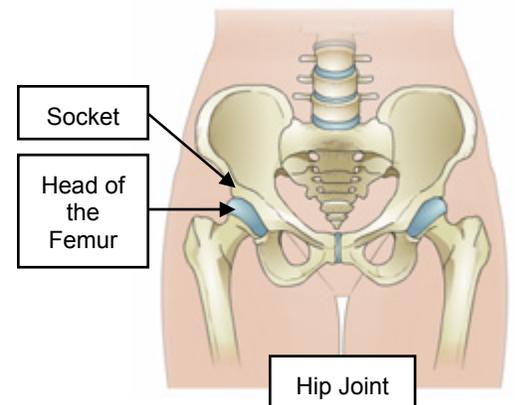
Severe arthritis in the hip can lead to severe pain and inability to walk. To relieve the pain and improve your ability to walk, your surgeon has performed a total hip replacement surgery. Hip replacement surgery is a very safe operation. It can help to relieve the pain and improve your ability to move and walk. Any surgery can result in complications. It is important that you understand these possible complications and what you and your health care team can do to prevent them from happening.



This reference summary will help you understand better hip replacement surgery and how you can help to prevent complications.

Anatomy

The hip joint joins the leg to the pelvis. The head of the femur, or thigh bone, has the shape of a ball that fits in a socket in the pelvis. The surfaces of the ball and socket should be smooth and allow painless movement.



Surgical Treatment

The operation is done through an incision in the hip. It usually takes anywhere from two to three hours. The head of the femur is cut and the socket is prepared to accept an artificial surface known as prosthesis. The head and neck of the femur are replaced with a high-grade metal prosthesis. The socket is replaced with a metal shell lined with medical grade high density plastic.

Depending on the type, the prosthesis may need to be adhered to the bone. Some types of prostheses do not need to be adhered. The surrounding bone grows into the prosthesis and acts like an adhesive. At the end of the operation the skin is closed. A drain, called a hemovac or reinfuser, may be used to remove excess fluid.

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Preventing Complications

This operation is safe. But there are several potential complications. These are unlikely. But they are possible. You need to know about them just in case they happen. By being informed you may be able to help your health care provider detect complications early.

The complications include:

- Those related to anesthesia.
- Those related to any type of surgery.
- Those specific to this type of surgery.

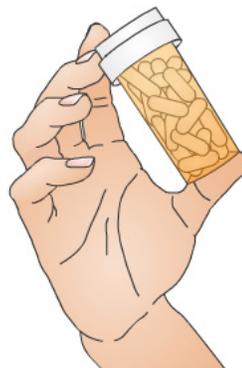
Complications related to anesthesia include:

- Heart attacks.
- Strokes.
- Pneumonia.
- Blood clots in the legs.



General Anesthesia

Blood clots in the legs can happen. This usually shows up a few days after surgery. It causes the leg to swell and hurt a lot. These blood clots can be dislodged from the legs and go to the lungs, where they will cause shortness of breath, chest pain and possibly death. Sometimes the shortness of breath can happen without warning. It is important to let your health care providers know if any of these symptoms happen.



Getting out of bed shortly after surgery may help decrease the risks of blood clots in the legs. You may also receive blood thinners and use compression boots to prevent clots from forming.



Some complications are seen in any type of surgery. These include: Infection, deep or at the skin level. If an infection involves the prosthesis, it may need to be removed. You may be given antibiotics through your IV line before and after surgery to prevent infection from happening.

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Your ability to walk steadily will be impaired during the first few days after surgery. You may have a catheter inserted into your bladder to minimize the need to walk to the bathroom. To prevent you from getting any infections related to the use of the catheter it is usually removed on the second day after surgery. Once removed, report any problems with urination, such as difficulty starting the urine stream, pain or burning to your health care provider.

Some bleeding and drainage is to be expected after surgery. The health care provider will monitor your blood levels to determine if a transfusion or other blood replacement therapy is required. A drain tube may be inserted near the surgical site to prevent excess fluid and blood from building up in the area around the new hip.



Drain
Tube

In the first 4 hours after surgery, it is sometimes possible to collect the blood and filter it to give it back to you as a transfusion. This will help you to keep your blood levels up after surgery.

Another complication is a skin scar that may be painful or ugly.

Other complications are related specifically to this surgery. These are rare. But it is important to know about them. The following organs in the thigh and hip area are close to the surgical area and may be damaged.

Arteries and veins going to the leg may be affected. Nerves going down to the leg may also be affected with leg weakness or decreased sensation. Be sure to report any changes in or loss of sensation as well as any sudden increase in pain to the surgical leg to your health care provider.



The prosthesis itself may become loose from the adjoining bone. The ball may also dislocate and pop out of the socket. A difference in leg length may happen in rare cases. The hip may not move as well as a normal hip joint. It may feel stiff. In rare cases, the pain may not be relieved by the operation. It may even become worse than before surgery. You may have a potentially fatal allergic reaction to the adhesive used.

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After the Surgery

You will be able to sit up part way in bed or a chair after surgery. But it is very important that you do not cross your legs, bend too far at the hip or sit up all the way in bed. To prevent you from crossing your legs you may have a triangular wedge, called an abductor pillow, placed between your legs. You will be taught how to get up without bending completely at the hip.

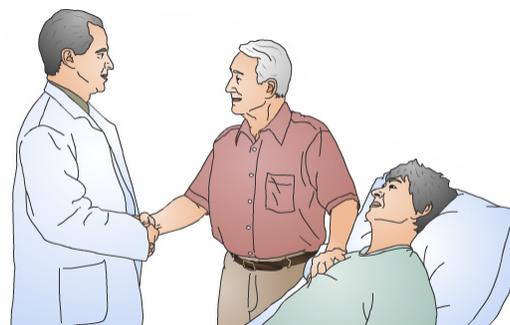


Abductor Pillow

Over time you will be able to increase your range of movement under the strict supervision of a physical therapist. As you gradually strengthen your hip muscles, you may resume most of your usual activities. You may need the help of a walker initially to take the pressure off your new hip. Eventually you will most likely be able to walk without any aid.

Planning for Discharge

As soon as the day after surgery, you may be visited by a discharge planning nurse. He or she will assist you with making arrangements for equipment and assistance you may need at home. If your health care provider orders any special medications requiring a shot, such as blood thinners, for use at home, you or a family member will be taught how to give the injections.



The usual stay in a health care facility for this surgery is 3 to 4 days. If you need the services of intensive physical therapy or specialized nursing, a short stay at an extended care facility may be needed to improve the outcome of this surgery. If you need this, the discharge planner will help you with the arrangements.

Summary

Severe arthritis in the hip can lead to severe pain and inability to walk. To relieve the pain and improve your ability to walk, you may have total hip replacement surgery. Hip replacement is very successful in helping decrease your pain and improving your quality of life.

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This operation is safe with good results. But complications may happen. Knowing about them will help you detect them early if they happen.

Working with your health care team to prevent complications will help you to have a more comfortable stay and lead you towards home.



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