

IS A PARTIAL KNEE REPLACEMENT RIGHT FOR YOU? Five Questions to Ask your Surgeon

Is anyone you know over the age of 50 completely free from knee pain? It seems everyone suffers with stiff or painful knees at least occasionally, and research indicates that up to 30% of the adult population is living with at least some osteoarthritis, in one or both knees. Until the age of 50, the condition is equally common in men and women, but prevalence in women increases after 50. As the U.S. population ages, and becomes more active later in life, the demand for stronger and healthier knees continues to drive innovation in the medical community.

“Candidates for knee replacement surgery have traditionally been those suffering from significant pain and limited mobility due to osteoarthritis,” says Kevin Bowers, MD, medical director of the Joint Replacement Center at Oro Valley Hospital. “But as patients become increasingly active in their 60’s, 70’s and even 80’s, we are continually challenged to develop and provide new and better clinical solutions. Most patients are no longer content with just being able to walk without pain at age 70 - now they demand strong and flexible joints that allow them to hike, bike and play tennis.”

While osteoarthritis can be caused or worsened by injury or inflammatory conditions, the primary cause of osteoarthritis by far is your genetic makeup. Osteoarthritis is the wearing away of the connective tissue - or cartilage - within a joint. Cartilage prevents one bone from scraping against another, acts as a shock absorber, and allows for smooth and stable movement within the joint. Because the durability of cartilage is a genetic factor, it’s true that many people end up with osteoarthritis, simply because it runs in the family.

Early treatments often consist of weight loss programs, anti-inflammatory medications, and injection therapies to help supplement the lost cartilage and minimize pain. When these remedies are no longer sufficient, and the patient’s quality of life is at risk, knee replacement is often the next step - and is surprisingly common. There are currently more than 700,000 knee replacement surgeries performed each year in the U.S. Statistics suggest that this number will rise to a staggering 3.5 million cases annually by the year 2030.

Total vs. Partial Knee Replacement

While partial knee replacement surgeries have been around for many years, they used to be reserved for older patients who lived mostly sedentary lifestyles. Now, partial knee replacement is often preferred in younger patients, as their recovery is quicker and with much less pain. It’s estimated that about 25 to 30 percent of patients with arthritic knees are eligible for partial knee procedures.

“There are three compartments of the knee joint, but the inner - or medial - area is the most likely to experience cartilage breakdown,” says Edward Petrow, DO, an orthopedic surgeon and independent member of the medical staff at Northwest Medical Center. “When arthritis is present in only one of the joint’s compartments, and it doesn’t respond to non-surgical treatments, the patient may be a good candidate for partial knee replacement, offering them less pain and recovery time than a full replacement.”

When deciding on any surgical treatment plan, your surgeon will give consideration to your current health status and complication risks, your lifestyle and its physical demands, and your ability to coordinate the down time and therapy you will need for recovery in post-surgery. You should be fully open with your doctor about these issues, so he or she can identify whether a full or partial knee procedure is the safest and most beneficial path for you.

If you decide to proceed with a partial knee replacement, be sure to **ask your surgeon these five questions:**

- What kind of prosthesis will you use in my knee, and why?
- What will my recovery look like, and when should I expect to return to my job/family/social activities?
- Once my partial knee resurfacing is complete, will I be arthritis free?
- What are the long-term expectations for my new joint? What can I expect 5, 10 and 20 years post-surgery?
- What are the potential complications of surgery, and what can I do to minimize them?

Whether you decide on a full or partial replacement of your knee joint, be sure you have considered and shared with your surgeon all of your concerns, expectations and current medical issues. Millions of people worldwide have found their lives dramatically improved, thanks to joint replacement surgery. If you need to be connected with a qualified orthopedic surgeon, visit HealthierTucson.com to be connected with one of Northwest Healthcare's experienced providers.

About Northwest Healthcare

Northwest Healthcare is an integrated healthcare provider committed to delivering Tucson and surrounding communities with high quality, accessible healthcare. Northwest Healthcare includes Northwest Medical Center, Oro Valley Hospital, Northwest Emergency Centers in Vail and Marana, five Northwest Urgent Care locations, The Women's Center at Northwest, Northwest Allied Physicians, Desert Cardiology, Northwest Heart & Vascular, Northwest Tucson Surgery Center, Tucson Surgery Center and Center for Pain Management. Northwest Healthcare is making it more convenient to see a clinician when and where patients need it. For non-life threatening conditions, patients can check in online at HealthierTucson.com and click on "Online Check In" to choose a projected treatment time at any Northwest Healthcare Emergency Room or urgent care. Patients may also use online scheduling for Northwest Allied Physician primary care providers by visiting MyTucsonDoc.com. To learn more, visit HealthierTucson.com

###

