

TOTAL KNEE REPLACEMENT

What is wrong with my knee?

Knee arthritis is a very common cause of knee pain especially in middle age and elderly individuals. Our joints are lined with a slippery white structure called cartilage. This cartilage cushions the end of your bones. When this cartilage wears away or degrades over time, it is called arthritis. Knee arthritis will usually cause pain, swelling, and stiffness.

What causes knee arthritis?

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis. This is the general “wear and tear” of the joint. Being overweight puts extra force on the joint and may accelerate the “wear and tear” or damage to the knee joint. Chronic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or gout can also lead to inflammation of the knee joint and damage to the cartilage. If you have ever had an injury to your knee, you may be at risk for “traumatic” arthritis. All of these problems can cause damage to the cartilage. Once the cartilage is damaged, it can not heal itself. The damage may continue to progress over time.

How is knee arthritis diagnosed?

Your doctor will get your medical history and do an examination. Most patients will complain of pain in their knee, usually worse with activity. Many patients will also complain of swelling and stiffness in their knee. X-rays are routinely done in the office. X-rays usually show a narrowed space between the thigh bone (femur) and the shin bone (tibia). You may also see bone spurs or cysts (pits) in the bone.



How is knee arthritis treated?

Initial treatment of knee arthritis can include medications, injections, and activity modification. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (nsaids) such as ibuprofen, motrin, or aleve are commonly used. There are two types of injections that can be done. The most common type of injection is with cortisone. Cortisone is a steroid anti-inflammatory that is injected directly into the knee joint. Cortisone will usually help relieve pain and swelling in the knee. You can have up to 3 injections per year or every 4 months. The other type of injection is a “visco supplementation” called Synvisc or Hylagen. These injections work well in patients who have mild to moderate arthritis. It is a series

of 3 injections (1 injection per week for 3 weeks). When all else fails, you may decide to have a knee replacement.



What happens if I need surgery?

The reason to have a total knee replacement is for pain relief and only you can decide when the pain is bad enough to warrant surgery. The surgical techniques for knee replacements have advanced significantly over the past several years. Many surgeons are doing minimally invasive surgery (MIS). MIS is done through a smaller incision allowing patients to recover from surgery faster. You will usually spend about 2-3 days in the hospital. At home, a therapist and nurse will visit you for the first 3 weeks. Most patients will use a walker or cane for 3-6 weeks. Return to normal activities is around 3 months.