



knee & hip REPLACEMENTS

Joint replacement surgery now less of a pain

WRITTEN BY **KARA HOEGER**
 PATIENT PICTURED **MARGARET ZIENTARA**

“I can remember nights I’d be crying because I was in so much pain,” Margaret Zientara recalled. Now walking with ease on two new knees, the 66-year-old Villa Park resident also attends water aerobics twice a week.

Zientara’s right leg bares a 12-inch scar from a total knee replacement performed in July 2003. She spent 12 days recuperating in the hospital and received one month of home therapy.

When Zientara had her left knee replaced by Jeffrey Meisles, M.D., at Elmhurst Memorial Hospital (EMH) in April 2004, she was sent home within a couple of days and drove herself to therapy at the LifePlan Center in Elmhurst. What was different about her left knee? A much smaller 4-inch scar, thanks to minimally invasive knee replacement surgery.

Smaller instruments, smaller incisions

Maneuvering smaller instruments through smaller incisions lessens post-operative pain and speeds recovery for patients who undergo minimally invasive joint surgery. Once the only method used for knee and hip replacements, traditional open surgery involves an 8- to 12-inch incision to access the hip or knee. Minimally invasive surgery (MIS) techniques reduce recovery times for many operations from weeks to days.

In MIS for hips and knees, fewer muscles, ligaments and tendons are cut. “Patients’ rehabilitation time on a transitional care unit is often reduced from one to two weeks to three to five days,” said John Nikoleit, M.D., orthopedic surgeon on staff at EMH, who performs MIS hip and MIS knee surgery, also known as quad-sparing.

“What’s different is the short-term result,” said Dr. Meisles, an orthopedic surgeon on staff at EMH. “Patients receive the same metal-and-plastic implant; they just have an easier recovery because the surgery to install the implant has improved.”

Knees replaced using the MIS method avoid a large incision in the tendon and quadriceps muscle, which is the main muscle in the front of the thigh. It is the healing of the tendon and muscle following traditional surgery that makes for a grueling recovery as patients flex the injured parts to regain motion.

Less pain, quicker recovery

The new approach utilizes an incision in the joint capsule only. “We’re no longer cutting into the muscle and tendon, so the muscles ‘wake up’ much more quickly after surgery,” explained Dr. Meisles. He has used the MIS technique since February 2004. “Oftentimes it took patients two weeks before they could do straight-leg raises. Now with MIS, they can lift their legs straight off their beds in the recovery room.”

With reduced trauma to soft tissues around the joint, patients experience less pain and require less medication. They’re more mobile; their muscle strength rebounds more quickly, so they have control of their legs and they feel confident that they can stand on their new joint.

“The early impression is that these patients are experiencing less post-operative pain, which allows them to progress more quickly in therapy and return to their previous lifestyles at a faster rate,” said Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare physical therapist Jenna Julian, DPT.

Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare offers a preoperative joint replacement seminar and a minimally invasive joint replacement class. Please see page 18 for more details or call CareMatch at 630.782.7878 for class dates and times.



HIGHLY POLISHED METAL

In total knee replacement surgery, the joint is resurfaced with highly polished metal and plastic implants, like those shown above, which allow the joint to move smoothly – eliminating friction and pain.

Visit us at www.emhc.org/healthconnections for more information on minimally invasive joint replacements.