

Joint replacement? Wait a little longer

More than seven million people are walking the Earth with a new knee or hip.

And if you're suffering from debilitating pain, the thought of becoming total joint replacement patient seven million one is probably appealing. But [James Murphy, MD](#), says try not to think about it until your mid-60s.

And Dr. Murphy, an orthopedic surgeon at OSF HealthCare in [Urbana, Illinois](#), should know. He comes from a long line of orthopedic surgeons and has been immersed in the field for decades.

Joint injuries

Generally speaking, a joint is where two bones meet in the body to allow movement.

Dr. Murphy explains that joint injuries can come suddenly, like one during a basketball game, and those are often treated with a brace or surgery. Joint injuries can also develop over many years – the wear-and-tear injuries. Treatments for those include medication, injections or surgery.

Replacement

Every person has unique joint health circumstances, but Dr. Murphy advises you wait until at least age 65 before considering a total joint replacement. He says if you get the surgery at, say, age 40, you may just have to do it again in 15 or 20 years.

Until then, try the aforementioned treatments: medication (over-the-counter or prescription), braces or injections by a health care provider. Losing weight helps, too. Dr. Murphy says dropping five pounds equates to taking 25 pounds of pressure off your knees.

Dr. Murphy also says holistic remedies like black cherry juice or turmeric have been proven to help.

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Dr. James Murphy, orthopedic surgeon at OSF HealthCare in Urbana, Illinois

“Black cherry juice is something I’ve had patients swear by. They’ve taught me about it. So, I don’t think you need a doctor’s advice for [holistic remedies] like that. But, seeing a doctor in conjunction with all that is a good idea because there might be some things that can be added.” (:19)

When it’s time for surgery, here’s what you can expect.

First, your doctor will want to know about anything that may complicate the procedure. This includes a history of urine infections or recent or upcoming dental work (beyond a normal checkup).

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“They’re drilling into the tooth, and there could be bacteria from your mouth that can get into your bloodstream. If that makes its way to a total [replaced] joint, it could be devastating. So that can be avoided with a simple antibiotic prescription around the time of the dental work.” (:16)

On surgery day itself:

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“What a joint replacement entails is making an incision and safely dissecting all the way down to the joint. Then, shaving away the arthritic joint and replacing it with an implant that’s made of metal and plastic. And that becomes your new knee, hip or ankle.” (:21)

Recovery

Dr. Murphy says what used to be a five to seven day stay in the hospital is now two to three days thanks to advances in the field.

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“It’s better for the patient, for their experience and their outcome, to get out of the hospital quickly. There are different things we do as far as pain control and therapy to get people in and out of the hospital as quick as is safe after surgery.” (:19)

Dr. Murphy advises patients to work on range of motion in the first couple weeks post-surgery. That’s at home and with a physical therapist. After week three, most patients start to notice a difference. By two months, they feel like they have a normal life again.

And it’s important to define “normal life,” Dr. Murphy says.

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“[New joints] are meant to walk. They’re meant to walk as far as you’re willing to walk. They’re not meant for the cutting aspect of basketball, tennis or those kind of sports. Golf is perfectly fine. Swimming is great. Riding a bike is perfect. Rowing is great. It’s just the pounding on the knee that you want to avoid.” (:24)

Every day advice

So what can you do every day to maintain good joint health?

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“Strength training is great. Staying active. Staying with your exercise regimen. Maintaining a healthy diet is a great thing to do. Eating a lot of healthy foods that are going to maintain your joint health over a long period of time.” (:25)

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“Like any classic car, you need to maintain it.” (:02)

Visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#) for orthopedic resources.