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Your Journey With Arthritis...Now Gets Easy



Knee-replacement surgery—a cause of stress?



I feel challenged to walk without pain and do even my routine work because of the knee pain. I am getting too dependent on my family and this makes me uncomfortable. I am in stage 4 arthritis and my doctor has advised knee-replacement surgery... But the very thought of surgery stresses me completely... What should I do?



It is quite normal to feel nervous, anxious or stressed at the thought of surgery. However, understanding the whole process and gathering as much information as possible about the procedure will go a long way in lessening one's anxiety and increase the feeling of being in control.

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Are there no alternatives to surgery?

Doctors recommend knee surgery only when other management techniques such as physiotherapy, exercise, topical ointments and liniments, oral medications, supporting braces and walking aids such as a walking stick do not help in reducing the pain or improving knee function for long term.

If the pain does not respond to any non-surgical techniques, **surgery may be the only solution**. A number of surgical options are available, including the following:

- 1. Arthroscopic surgery:** A tiny tube fitted with a camera is inserted through a small cut near the knee, enabling the surgeon to visualise the joint from inside. The surgeon can then remove the damaged cartilage and flush out loose bone pieces (lavage) that cause pain. Recovery doesn't take much time. However, it provides only short-term relief and can only help in delaying the knee-replacement surgery.
- 2. Osteotomy:** Either the thigh bone (femur) or the shin bone (tibia) is cut and reshaped to lessen the load on the knee.



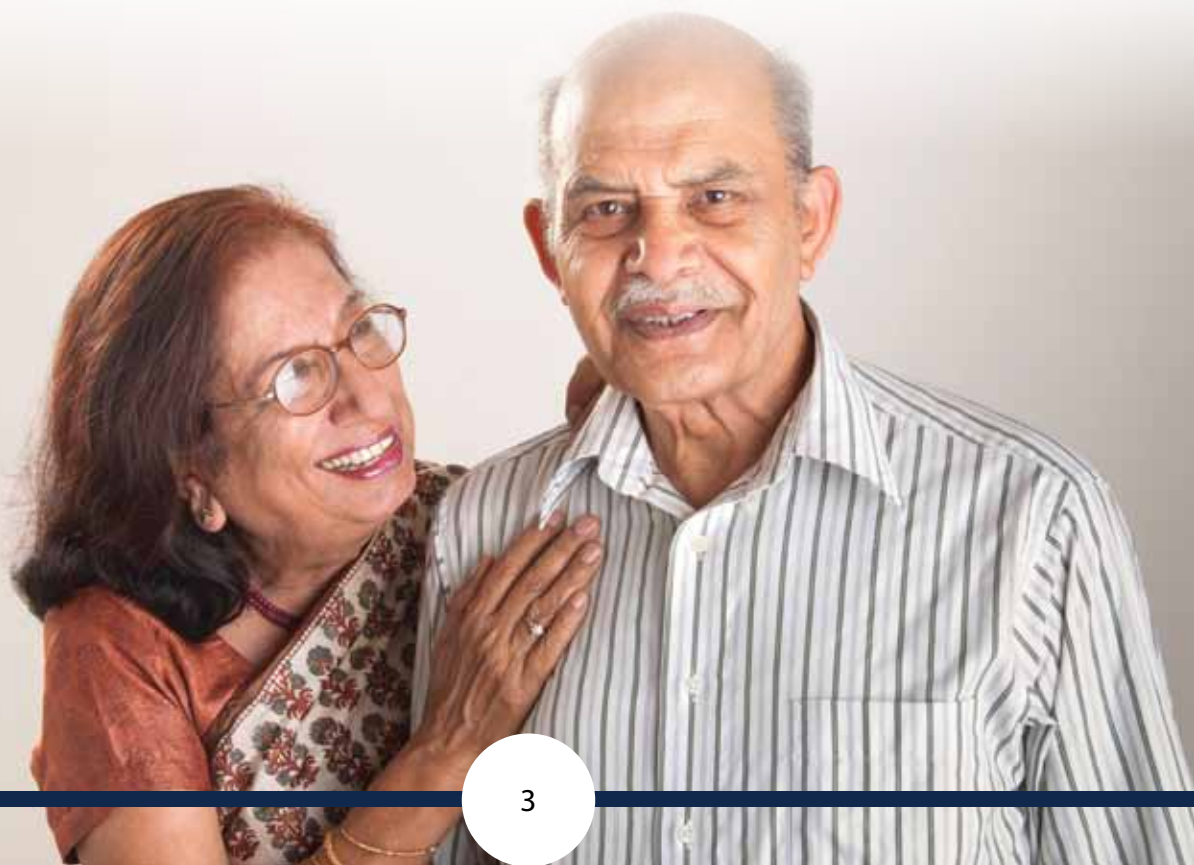
After having tried other options, knee-replacement surgery may be the best choice if the pain persists and mobility is significantly restricted, impacting the quality of life...



Why should I undergo such a major surgery? In what way would it benefit me?

The benefits of undergoing a knee-replacement surgery are manifold, including:

- Freedom from pain
- Increased mobility
- Better psychological well-being
- Better quality of life
 - Everyday activities such as getting up from a chair, walking, climbing stairs and driving may become easier
 - Exercises such as swimming, cycling and playing golf may become easier



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What could possibly happen if I do not undergo a knee-replacement surgery?

If you are a patient with severe arthritis and have been advised to undergo knee-replacement surgery as the best alternate to restore your quality of life, then postponing surgery may not be a good idea.

Despite being advised for knee-replacement surgery, many patients postpone the surgery until their pain or mobility issues become unbearable. However, studies have shown that waiting until the pain or functional limitation increases often makes surgery more difficult. Also, chances of regaining good function may be reduced. There may be adverse consequences of postponing knee-replacement surgery, such as:

Loss of function may affect the quality of life and have a negative impact on the emotional well-being.

- Developing deformities
- Muscles and ligaments may lose their function and become weak
- Chronic pain leading to functional limitation, including a greater difficulty in performing daily activities such as walking, driving, bathing, climbing stairs, getting up from a chair
- Continued use of affected joints could worsen the condition, making surgery more complicated
 - Longer procedure means more time under general anaesthesia, further increasing the risk during surgery

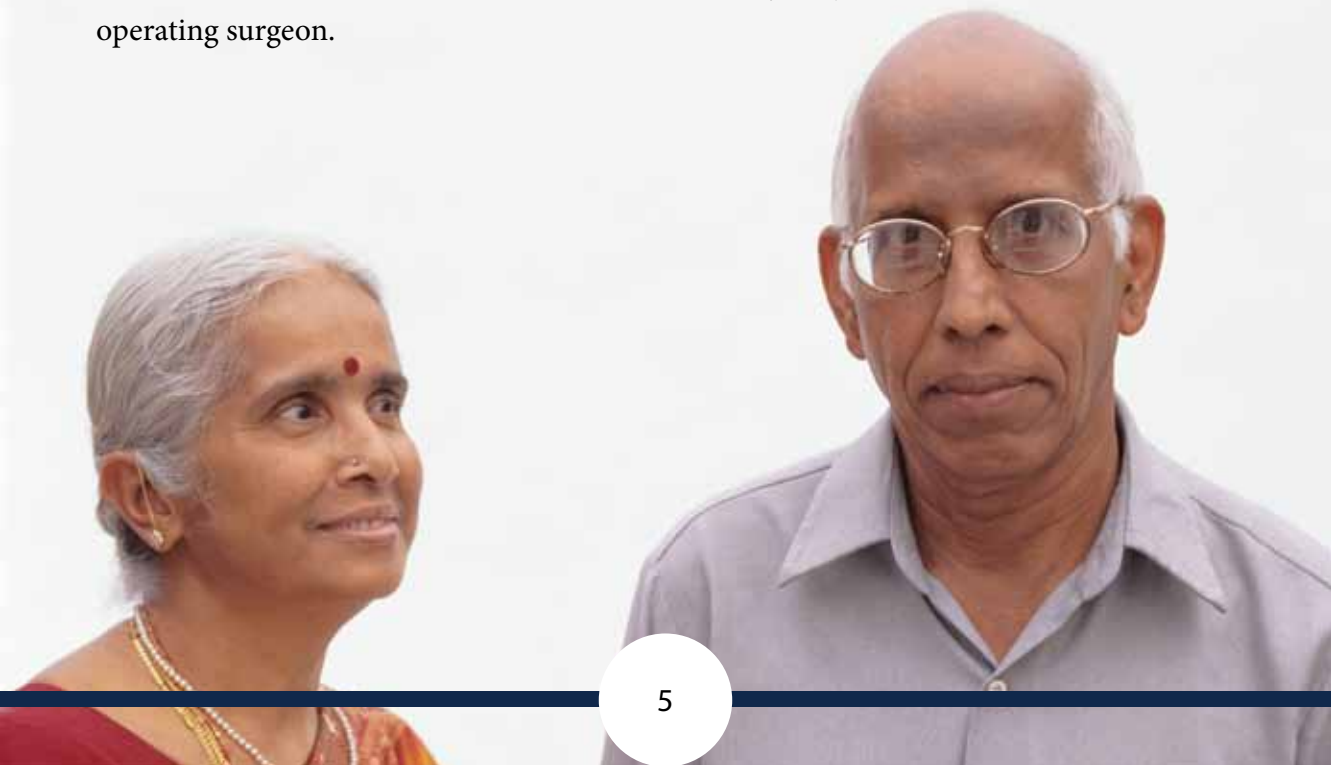
Once pain and functional limitation do not respond to conservative treatment, it is prudent not to postpone surgery. The earlier the knee is replaced, the better it is!

I am already more than 60 years of age, can I undergo such a surgery?

Usually adults of any age can undergo knee-replacement surgery. Most of the knee-replacement surgeries are performed in 60- to 80-year-old individuals, provided they are adequately healthy to undergo a major surgery and the intensive rehabilitation that follows. Knee-replacement surgery is usually recommended for the older individuals as youngsters are physically more active and may wear out the replaced joint much quickly.

I am very anxious about the surgery... Would it take a very long stay in the hospital?

Knee-replacement surgery involves a short hospital stay and is performed under general anaesthesia. The knee is kept bent while performing the procedure, so that all the joint surfaces are exposed fully. A 6- to 10-inch-long incision is made. After moving the knee cap aside, the surgeon will cut and remove the damaged portions of the bone and cartilage. Later, the components of the artificial joint are positioned precisely and attached. Once this is done, the surgeon will then bend and rotate the knee to check for function and balance before closing up the knee. The entire procedure may take anywhere from half an hour to 2 hours on the basis of the condition of your joint and the experience of the operating surgeon.



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What are the risks involved?

Knee-replacement surgery is a common surgical procedure. A majority of people undergoing knee-replacement surgery do not experience any complications. However, as with any other procedures, there are certain risks involved with this procedure too. Most complications are minor and can be treated successfully. The following are few of the risks of knee-replacement surgery:

1. **Stiffness of the knee:** Continuing or increasing stiffness may be observed in some patients, which usually resolves with exercise. Stopping physiotherapy because of pain in the recovery phase contributes to stiffness. This can be treated by manipulating the knee under regional anaesthesia, followed by intense physiotherapy
2. **Infection** of the surgical wound: This is usually treated with antibiotics
3. **Deep infection** in the replaced knee joint: This may need further surgery and rarely a replacement of the artificial joint
4. **Unexpected bleeding** of the knee
5. **Inadvertent damage** to the ligament, nerve or artery in the surgical site
6. **Blood clots or deep vein thrombosis** in the joint: Blood clots may form in the veins of the legs because of reduced movement soon after surgery. This may be prevented by using specially designed stockings for support when patients start to walk as soon as permissible and using medications that prevent clot formation
7. **Bone fracture:** Bone fracture may occur around the knee joint immediately after or during the surgery. Treatment of the same depends on the type and extent of the fracture
8. **Restricted movement** in the knee: Excess bone or scar tissue formation around the replaced knee may restrict movement. Further surgery may be needed to restore movement
9. **Dislocation** of the knee cap: Requires further surgery
10. **Numbness** around the wound scar: This usually resolves by itself over time
11. **Allergy:** Patients sensitive to bone cement (if used in the surgery) may develop allergy

Call the doctor if:

- Hot, reddened, hard or painful areas develop in the first few weeks after the surgery; it could be just bruising or indications of a blood clot
- Chest pain or breathlessness: This could be an indication of a blood clot in the chest; although very rare, it needs immediate medical attention
- Joint instability is noticed after a prolonged period. The treating doctor will evaluate accordingly

How many years will my replaced knee work?

Similar to your natural knees, your artificial knees will undergo wear and tear over the years. However, artificial knees may last up to 15-20 years in 80-90% of the patients, if these are not excessively strained. Although there is no limitation to the number of times a worn-out knee can be replaced, redoing the procedure is often more complicated and may take a longer time to complete. Revision surgeries are becoming routine and successful over the time. However, more complex components may be needed if a second or third replacement is being carried out in the same knee. Chances of revision surgery may be higher in patients:

- With partial knee replacement
- Undergoing knee replacement at a young age
- Who are overweight and obese
- Involved in heavy manual labour or who place a high stress on their joints and implants

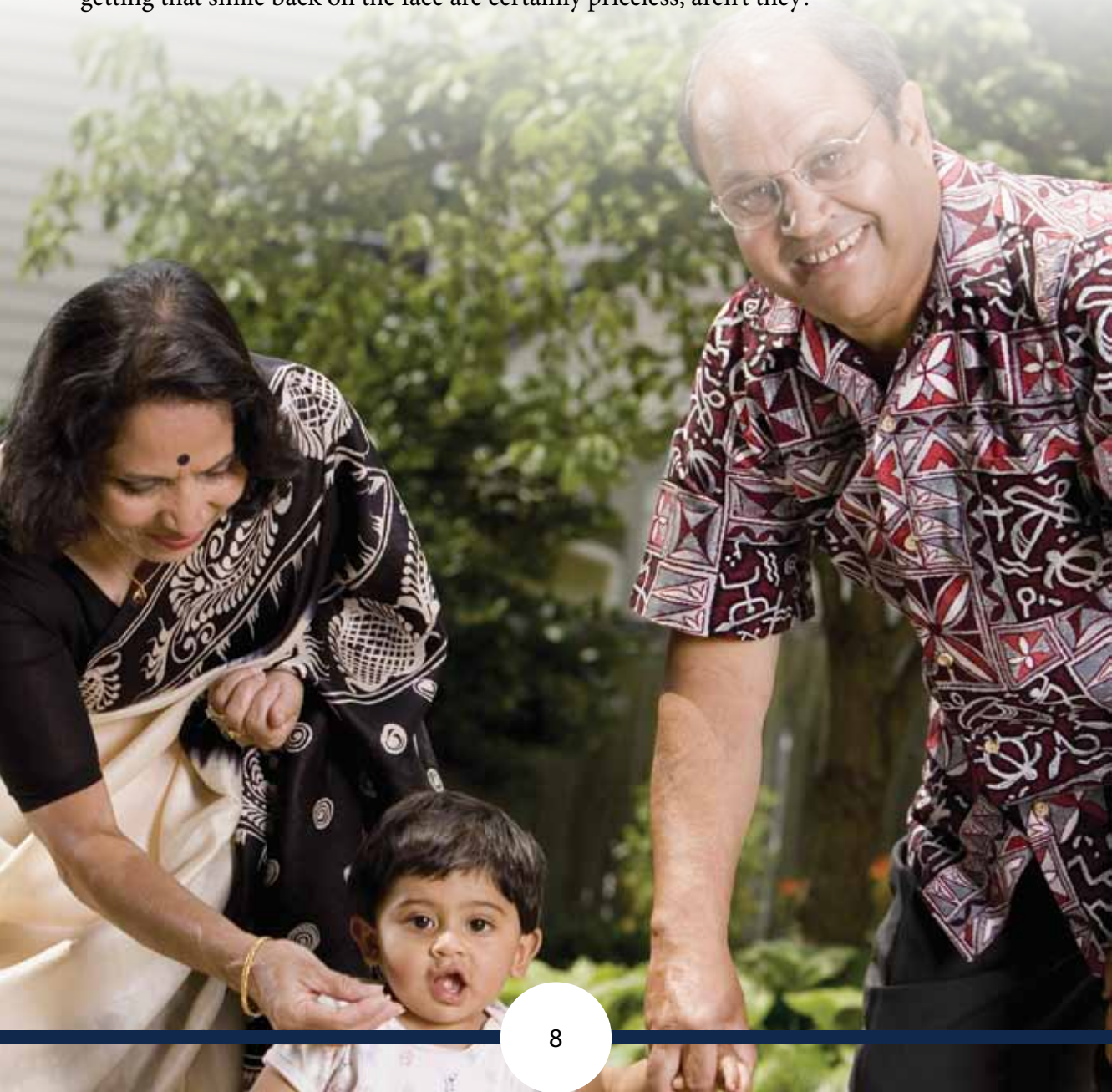
A total of 90% of patients experience pain relief and are able to get back to work, significantly improving their quality of life!

- Approximately 4 out of 5 people undergoing knee-replacement surgery are happy with their new knees
- Studies have shown that more than 82% of patients undergoing knee-replacement surgery are completely satisfied with the outcomes

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What about the finances involved? Would it be a very expensive procedure? Would it be worth to get this procedure done?

Like any other procedure, knee replacement also involves a procedure and rehabilitation cost. Compared with the outcomes of the surgery, patients and their families find this expense worthy! Getting yourself or your loved ones rid of the everyday disabling pain and getting that smile back on the face are certainly priceless, aren't they?



The total cost of the knee-replacement surgery varies greatly depending on many factors, including:

- Length of stay in the hospital: Varies depending on the type of procedure
 - Total replacement, partial replacement and replacement of both knees
- The type of implant and surgical approach used:
 - Implant material
 - Customised instruments used
 - Specialised technology
- Any pre-existing conditions of the patient that may require any special precautions or extra care during the surgery
- Management of unexpected complications during the hospital stay
- Costs involved during the intense rehabilitation phase

Your doctor will be able to give you the various options available in order to make a decision. However, irrespective of the costs involved, there is a net benefit for patients undergoing knee-replacement surgery and rehabilitation, particularly for end-stage osteoarthritis patients who do not respond to any other treatments.

Knee-replacement surgery is a valuable and cost-effective treatment for patients in end-stage osteoarthritis of the knee.

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