

# Severe osteoarthritis (OA) of the knee

*Your treatment options. Your second opinion.*



## **What is severe osteoarthritis (OA) of the knee**

Your knee joint can be affected by a progressive disease called osteoarthritis (OA) that commonly leads to symptoms including pain, stiffness, swelling and a limp. It can develop at any age, but tends to be more likely in people aged over 40 years and if you've had a joint injury.

OA is often referred to as 'wear and tear' of the joint, but we now know that it's a disease that affects your whole joint. It begins when cartilage (cushion at the end of the bones that enables joints to move smoothly) breaks down and may slowly lead to joint inner lining inflammation, bone spurs, deterioration of joint ligaments and muscle tendons, and further cartilage damage.

While there's still no cure for OA, non-surgical treatments may often be initially suggested and help improve your knee OA symptoms or prevent worsening.

However, some people may end up developing symptoms that can include pain that doesn't improve with rest and medications, night pain that disturbs your sleep and limitations in your ability to walk and do everyday activities such as dressing and getting out of a chair.

## **Treatment options**

The treatment options for severe knee OA may include:

- > Providing non-surgical treatments as effectively as possible.
- > Various surgical procedures including arthroscopy, microfracture, osteotomy.
- > Joint replacement surgery.

## **Non-surgical treatments**

Non-surgical treatments may be most effective for knee OA when provided in combination and tailored to the needs of each individual. The treatments may include:

- > Weight loss, to take pressure off your knee joint. For example, losing 5% of body weight may lead to a 30% improvement in symptoms.
- > Exercises for improved strength and reduced stiffness.
- > Medications: Paracetamol, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to reduce pain and inflammation.
- > Avoid aggravating factors and use walking aids and specialised equipment to reduce pain.

- > Corticosteroid or hyaluronic acid (artificial joint fluid) injections to reduce pain and stiffness.

All treatments may have side effects.

## **Various surgical procedures**

Surgical procedures that may be suggested include arthroscopy, which is keyhole surgery to wash and clean out the knee joint; microfracture to the joint surface to stimulate cartilage growth; and osteotomy, which cuts away bone to reduce pressure on the joint.

However, unless your knee joint has a loose body or mechanical locking symptoms, arthroscopy may often be no more effective than non-surgical treatments. Sometimes arthritic symptoms are aggravated by arthroscopic surgery when done in the absence of mechanical symptoms.

## **Joint replacement surgery**

If you have severe knee OA symptoms, joint replacement surgery may be suggested to you as a 'last resort' treatment.

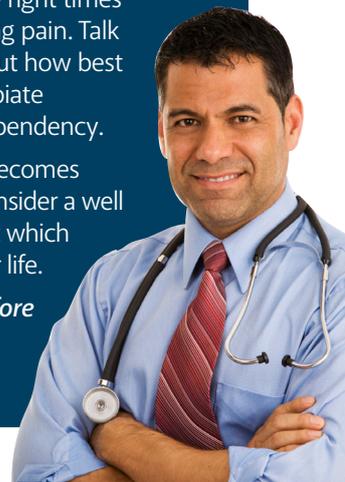
Joint replacement surgery (arthroplasty) involves removing your joint and replacing it with an artificial joint made of plastics and metal. It may be either a total knee (both sides) or half joint (one side) and your kneecap (patella) may also be replaced. Surgery may be done through an incision (cut) or mini-incision (smaller cut).

## **Help for non-surgical treatments**

The following may help your non-surgical treatments be as effective as possible:

- > Losing weight may be easier to achieve with an exercise program, psychological therapies and seeing a dietician who can assess your needs and provide nutritional education and advice on a healthy diet.
- > It may be difficult to get started with exercise because of your pain. Under the guidance of a physiotherapist you may be better able to gently start improving strength and flexibility.
- > Taking the right medication at the right times may be most effective for reducing pain. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how best to use your medications. Avoid opiate medications due to the risk of dependency.
- > When knee pain and incapacity becomes unacceptable, it is then time to consider a well performed total knee replacement which should improve the quality of your life.

**Always consult a medical expert before commencing a course of treatment for any medical condition.**





The time required for post-surgery pain and swelling to settle down is usually a few months. Full recovery and benefits may take up to two years. Strengthening exercises following knee replacement, both during rehabilitation and at home, are very important to obtain a good result.

### **Joint replacement surgery and medical research**

When evaluating you for joint replacement surgery or other treatments for severe knee OA, your treating medical specialist will take into account many complex factors, including the latest medical research.

Studies on joint replacement surgery, without comparing to non-surgical treatments, have found that surgery may achieve substantial improvements in pain, physical functioning and quality of life.

### **Joint replacement surgery and risks**

While complications following joint replacement surgery are not common, they do occur, including infection, blood clots, nerve damage, instability of the kneecap (patella) and loosening of the artificial parts, which may require a second replacement surgery. Persistent pain can occur in a small minority of patients.

### **Joint replacement surgery and severe knee OA – the main points**

- > If you have severe knee OA symptoms, you should discuss with your doctor whether you need joint replacement surgery as a 'last resort' treatment.
- > Non-surgical treatments for severe knee OA may be most effective when provided in combination and tailored to the needs of each individual. Strengthening exercises are of great benefit in delaying the need for surgery and obtaining a good result after surgery is performed.

### **Would you like a second opinion?**

Deciding on a treatment plan for a medical condition can be difficult, complex and stressful.

Would you like the benefit of an expert second opinion to help you to decide on your treatment options?

**If you want to know more about GPS<sup>2</sup> or have a general enquiry, please contact us on 1800 477 246 or email via [contact@gps2.com.au](mailto:contact@gps2.com.au)**

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