

Is Hip & Knee Pain Slowing You down?

Of the more than 230 joints in the body, the hip and knee are two of the largest. They also are the body's main source of mobility. That's why when you have hip or knee pain, your world might just feel like it's slowing down.



With osteoarthritis as one of its primary causes, hip and knee pain can range from a mild soreness that is merely annoying to a deep and constant ache that affects even the simplest of movements, like getting out of bed in the morning or going up and down stairs. Severe hip and knee pain can even make sitting, standing and sleeping uncomfortable.

Of course, when pain starts, our natural inclination is to slow down and take it easy. But that tactic can backfire with degenerative joint disease, leading to further de-conditioning, disability and problems. Over time, persistent hip and knee pain caused by osteoarthritis cannot only limit your activities but it can interfere with your ability to work, depress you emotionally and significantly affect your quality of life.

Whether you've just started experiencing pain or have been battling it for years, understanding the essentials of hip and knee pain, as well as available treatment options, can help you make the decisions necessary to get you back on your feet again, and return you to a maximum level of functioning as quickly and safely as possible.

Hip & Knee Basics

One in five Americans age 60 and older experiences significant knee pain on most days of the week, according to Harvard Medical School, and one in seven has significant hip pain. Such joint problems lead to more than 1 million hip and knee replacements each year, and that number is expected to climb to 1.4 million by 2015. But depending on the source and severity of your pain, the solution might be as simple as a set of exercises.

Understanding some basic anatomy can be helpful when trying to determine treatment options for hip and knee pain.

The knee is a hinge joint, which means it is capable of bending and extending. The hip joint consists of a ball-and-socket structure, which gives it a more extensive range of motion that includes bending, extending, abduction (sideways leg extension), adduction (leg crossing) and rotation. Working together in a series of coordinated movements, the hip and knee support the upper half of the body while simultaneously providing motion to the lower half.

Hip and knee pain can occur for a variety of reasons: repetitive movements, old impact or sports injuries, poor posture, inactivity, or falls. But the most common

You May Benefit from Joint Replacement if...

1. You have severe pain that limits everyday activities, including walking, climbing stairs, and getting in and out of chairs.
2. You experience moderate or severe pain while resting, either day or night.
3. You have chronic joint inflammation and swelling that does not improve with rest or medications.
4. You experience persistent stiffness that results in an inability to straighten the joint.
5. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications fail to relieve your pain.
6. You cannot tolerate the side effects or complications caused by pain medications.
7. Other treatments, such as cortisone injections and physical therapy, have failed to improve the condition.

Source: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

cause of joint pain is osteoarthritis, a disease that slowly degrades the cartilage that provides cushion to the bones of the hip and knee joints. The more degraded the cartilage is, the more severe joint pain becomes.

“Degenerative joint pain often develops gradually,” explains board-certified Orthopaedic Surgeon Steven Wardell, a specialist in hip and knee surgery who is affiliated with Palos Community Hospital where he performs more than 300 joint replacement procedures a year. “The problem may start as a mild ache or stiffness in the joint, but as the condition progresses, it can begin to impair a person’s mobility.”

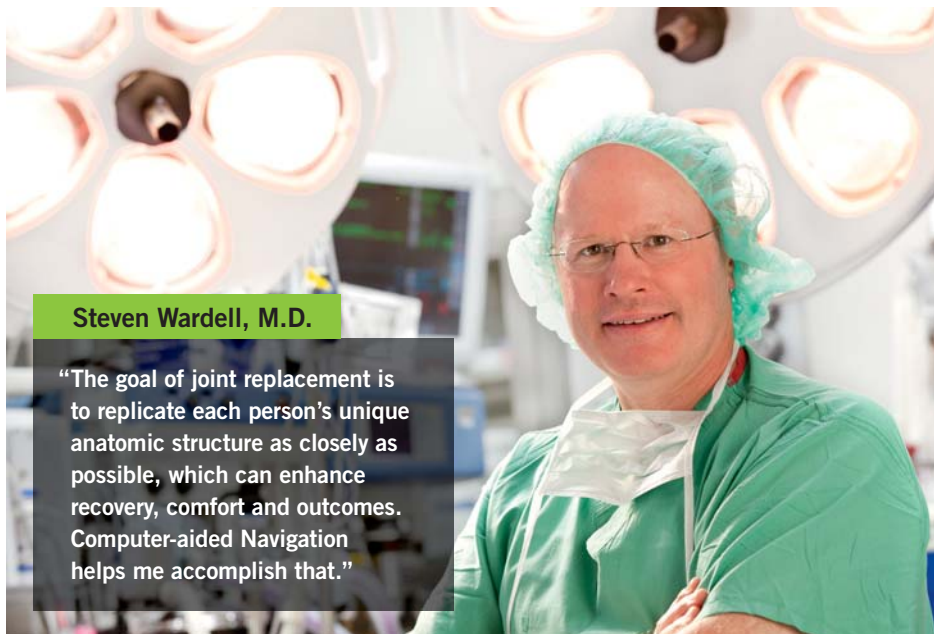
The gradual progression of hip and knee pain may cause some patients to complain that they can’t walk as far as they used to, or they have trouble getting in and out of a car. When joint pain starts to interfere with your activities of daily life, that’s when it’s time to get help.

Diagnosis and Treatment

The classic symptoms of joint degeneration include pain when performing everyday activities, pain that worsens with activity and decreases with rest, joint stiffness that makes it difficult to get out of a chair or climb stairs, and intermittent or chronic inflammation or swelling of the joint. When pain persists in the hip or knee, a comprehensive evaluation by an orthopaedic surgeon may be necessary. In addition to a physical exam, the physician may order various radiological tests – X-ray, CAT scan or MRI – to help diagnose the condition.

Treatment for hip and knee pain follows a fairly predictable and conservative course. Mild pain is often relieved by over-the-counter (OTC) medications, such as aspirin or Tylenol. Since hip and knee pain caused by osteoarthritis often worsens as the condition progresses, many patients find that OTC medications lose their effectiveness over time. The next stage of treatment may include prescription medication, physical therapy and/or injections.

“The treatment of hip and knee pain is intended to alleviate symptoms and improve the patient’s level of functioning in the least invasive manner possible.” Dr. Wardell says. “With appropriate medical management,



Steven Wardell, M.D.

“The goal of joint replacement is to replicate each person’s unique anatomic structure as closely as possible, which can enhance recovery, comfort and outcomes. Computer-aided Navigation helps me accomplish that.”

many patients can successfully control their symptoms for years. However, when the pain starts affecting your health and your quality of life despite non-surgical treatment, then it may be time to consider joint replacement.”

With recent advancements in orthopaedic techniques, hip and knee replacements are a viable option at almost any age. Minimally invasive surgery, computer-aided prosthetic placement and advances in pain management result in joint replacement surgery that can be performed with a high degree of precision, minimal pain and significantly decreased recovery time.

“The benefits of minimally invasive hip and knee surgery include reduced procedure time, significantly less pain, minimal muscle involvement and quicker recovery times,” explains Dr. Wardell. “Computer-assisted navigation further improves outcomes by providing a 3-dimensional image of the joint to allow for more precise implantation of the joint replacement as compared to traditional surgery. The goal of joint replacement is to replicate each person’s unique anatomic

structure as closely as possible, which can enhance recovery, comfort and outcomes. Computer-aided Navigation helps me accomplish that.”

Post-operatively, Dr. Wardell’s goal is to return the patient to a maximum level of functioning as quickly as possible. With an average hospital stay of three days, the majority of patients are walking within hours of surgery. Once home, patients are often followed by a nurse and physical therapist who work closely with Dr. Wardell to help return the patient to a normal or even improved level of functioning in as little as a few weeks. “Within a month, many patients are able to return to activities they weren’t able to perform prior to surgery,” Dr. Wardell says.

If you suffer the debilitating discomfort of hip and knee pain, options are available to improve your quality of life. To make an appointment with Dr. Wardell, or an orthopaedic surgeon in your area, please contact Palos Community Hospital’s Physician Referral Service at (708) 226-2300.

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Do you suffer from hip or knee pain? If so, join Orthopaedic Surgeon Steven Wardell, M.D., for a free presentation on minimally invasive, Navigation-assisted knee and hip replacement at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, December 7, at Palos Health & Fitness Center. As a leader in joint replacement in the Chicagoland area, Dr. Wardell will discuss common disorders of the hip and knee, and conservative treatments and surgical options for pain relief. Light refreshments will be served. For more information or to register, call (708) 226-2300 or visit us online at PalosCommunityHospital.org.