

Pros and cons of joint replacement surgery

To people outside the medical field, joint replacement surgery might sound like a solution that's considered only after all other options have been exhausted. But joint replacement surgery has become very common, even though some studies have suggested certain procedures are being performed unnecessarily.

A 2014 study published in the journal *Arthritis and Rheumatology* found that one-third of patients who undergo knee replacement surgery may not be appropriate candidates for the procedure because their symptoms are not severe enough to merit aggressive intervention like surgery.

The decision to undergo surgery is always a patient's to make. Weighing some pros and cons of joint replacement surgery can help patients make the most informed decisions possible.

PROS

The Cleveland Clinic notes that many patients who have undergone joint replacement surgeries have experienced dramatic improvement within a relatively short time after undergoing the surgery. Much of that improvement is related to pain, which for many people becomes overwhelming prior to surgery.

Another benefit to joint replacement surgery is the recovery time. For example, the Cleveland Clinic notes that patients who have knee replacement surgery are usually standing and even moving the joint the day after their surgeries. Within six weeks, those same patients are typically walking comfortably with very little support. While each patient is different, any fears that joint replacement surgery will require patients to be immobile for months after surgery are unwarranted.

Joint replacement surgery also can be a long-term solution, whereas the alternatives might not be. The Cleveland Clinic says that roughly 85 percent of knee implants will last 20 years, and that life expectancy figures to grow as technology advances.

CONS

As beneficial as joint replacement surgery can be, it's not without downsides. Cost is one such disadvantage. How much a patient pays for the surgery depends on his or her coverage, but AARP notes that the average knee replacement surgery costs \$31,000. Such costs can be prohibitive for aging men and women who are no longer working.

Another potential disadvantage to going under the knife, especially for those who are borderline candidates for replacement surgeries, is the likelihood that surgery won't have a significant impact on quality of life. A 2017 study published in the journal *BMJ* found that knee replacement had minimal effects on quality of life, especially for patients whose arthritis was not severe.

Joint replacement surgeries are common. When deciding if surgery is their best option, patients should consider the pros and cons of going under the knife before making their final choice.



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