Care After a Hip Replacement

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Hip replacement, or arthroplasty, is a surgical procedure during which the diseased parts of the hip joint are removed and replaced with new, artificial parts. These artificial parts are called the prosthesis. The goals of hip replacement surgery are to improve mobility by relieving pain and improve function of the hip joint.

WHO SHOULD HAVE HIP REPLACEMENT SURGERY?

The most common reason for hip replacement surgery is the wearing down of the hip joint that results from osteoarthritis. Other conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis (a chronic inflammatory disease that causes joint pain, stiffness and swelling), avascular necrosis (loss of bone caused by insufficient blood supply), injury and bone tumors also may lead to breakdown of the hip joint and the need for hip replacement surgery. Other causes are long-term steroid use, congenital dislocation of the hip andankylosing spondylitis, an inflammatory joint disease.

WHAT DOES HIP REPLACEMENT SURGERY INVOLVE?

The hip joint is located where the upper end of the femur meets the acetabulum. The femur, or thighbone, looks like a long stem with a ball on the end. The acetabulum is a socket or cup-like structure in the pelvis or hipbone. This ‘ball and socket’ arrangement allows a wide range of motion, including sitting, standing, walking and other daily activities.

During hip replacement, the surgeon removes the diseased bone tissue and cartilage from the hip joint. The healthy parts of the hip are left intact. The surgeon then replaces the head of the femur and the acetabulum with new, artificial parts. The new hip is made of materials that allow a natural, gliding motion of the joint. Hip replacement surgery usually lasts 2-3 hours.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR RECOVERY

- Arrange for transportation to and from the hospital.
- Arrange for someone to help you around the house for a week or two after coming home from the hospital.
- Set up a recovery station at home. Place the television remote control, radio, telephone, medicine, tissues, wastebasket, and pitcher and glass next to the spot where you will spend the most time while you recover.
- Stock up on kitchen staples and prepare food in advance, such as frozen casseroles or soups that can be reheated and served easily.
- Place items you use every day at arm level to avoid reaching up or bending down.

HOME RECOVERY

- Follow the doctor's instructions.
- Avoid any pressure on the affected hip and incision — do not cross legs, flex the hip or sit for longer than 1 hour.
- Keep the incision clean and inspect it daily. Report any redness or drainage to the physician.
- Work with a physical therapist or other health care professional to rehabilitate your hip.
- Wear an apron with pockets for carrying things around the house. This leaves hands and arms free for balance or to use crutches.
- Use a long-handled ‘reacher’ to turn on lights or grab things that are beyond arm’s length, use a raised toilet seat and secure hand rails beside the toilet. Hospital personnel may provide these or suggest where to buy one. Also consider using grippers on the bottom of the bathtub and a folding chair or stool in the shower to assist with bathing.

Resources


National Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NAMSIC).

http://www.nih.gov/niams/healthinfo/hiprepqa.htm