

Total Hip Replacement

What is a total hip replacement?

A total hip replacement is a surgical procedure to replace a hip joint with an artificial replacement (prosthesis). The hip may have been damaged or worn away due to a medical condition or an injury, causing loss of mobility and/or pain.

Who can benefit from having a total hip replacement?

There are many reasons why someone may need to undergo total hip replacement surgery. Those who suffer from certain types of arthritis, severe pain, mobility problems, bone tumors or a fracture of the bone (usually in the thigh bone) may wish to consider having a total hip replacement.

Procedure

A total hip replacement is a major operation that is performed under general anesthetic. An incision is made to expose the hip joint, and the upper part of the thigh bone removed to reveal the hip socket. The socket and any damaged tissue or bone is then hollowed out and replaced with an artificial socket. The prosthesis that replaces the upper part of the thigh bone is then fitted – this equates to a smooth ball attached to a protruding shaft. The ball then fits into the socket and the shaft is inserted into the thigh bone. The prosthesis is then fixed into place, muscles or tissue that was moved is put back into place, and the incision closed. The artificial joint and fixings used are dependent on the individual. Usually metal, ceramic or plastic (sometimes a combination) is used for the prosthesis, followed by a cement fixing. However, in younger or more active patients, a more versatile fixing may be used, or indeed none at all.

Recovery period

Patients should be able to leave hospital 7-10 days following their total hip replacement surgery. Walking is encouraged and you may need to use a cane or crutches, but you should avoid strenuous exercise. If you are in any pain, you will be able to take painkillers to alleviate the discomfort. Normally you will be assigned a physiotherapist following surgery, advising you on what activities you should or shouldn't be doing. You may be given some compression stockings to help with circulation and prevent and blood clots developing. You will be able to resume driving and return to work around six weeks following the total hip replacement (depending on the nature of your job).

Risks

As with any surgical procedure, there can be complications. In terms of a total hip replacement, this includes blood clotting, stiffened joints, infection of the wound, dislocation and a prosthesis break. Wearing out and loosening of the prosthesis, differences in leg length and nerve/blood vessel damage are also risks of total hip replacement surgery.