

Total Shoulder Replacement

What is total shoulder replacement surgery?

Total shoulder replacement (also called shoulder arthroplasty) is a surgical procedure to replace damaged parts of the shoulder using artificial prostheses.

Who can benefit from having total shoulder replacement surgery?

Most patients who undergo total shoulder replacement surgery are sufferers of severe arthritis in the shoulder, most commonly osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Another common reason may include injury to the shoulder. Individuals may be aware of severe pain, stiffness and mobility problems. Shoulder replacement surgery may be the best solution in these circumstances.

Procedure

The standard type of total shoulder replacement surgery is usually performed under a general anesthetic. An incision is made in the front of the shoulder and the damaged parts of the joint removed. The prostheses are then fitted into the shoulder. These typically consist of a new plastic socket, which is fixed into the place of the old socket. A metal 'bone' consisting of a ball with a protruding stem is then fitted with the ball placed into the new socket, and the metal stem fixed into the upper arm bone, creating mobility in the shoulder. Bone cement is usually used to fix the prostheses into place, but this will depend on the quality of the bone and whether there is any damage to the rotator cuff tendons. After the prostheses have been fitted, the initial incision is then closed using sutures or clips.

Recovery period

You will need to stay in hospital for around three days following your total shoulder replacement surgery. Your arm will be placed in a sling for several weeks and you will be assigned a physiotherapist to help strengthen the joint and begin mobility exercises with you. In terms of resuming work, driving and strenuous exercise, your physiotherapist will talk you through this, as it will vary between patients. Sutures will be removed around 10 days after surgery. Please be aware it may take between 6-12 months to reach full recovery.

Risks

Risks surrounding total shoulder replacement surgery include infection, bleeding, loosening of the prostheses, damage to blood vessels and nerves, dislocation, persistent pain and a noticeable difference in arm length.