



knee replacement: WHAT TO EXPECT

OUR EXPERT: BRETT J. GILBERT, M.D., BOARD CERTIFIED ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEON, TRIANGLE ORTHOPAEDIC ASSOCIATES

If you suffer from arthritis, your joints can be the first to suffer. Your knee is one of the most important joints in your body, bearing a significant amount of weight and pressure anytime you walk or stand. Over time, patients with osteoarthritis can suffer unbearable pain in their knee as the cartilage and other supporting tissue wears down over time, putting bone against bone.

A knee replacement may be the right solution to find pain relief and restore the full range of motion in the knee. A knee replacement can also be helpful for those who suffered an injury, such as in an accident or as the result of repetitive stress from exercises such as running.

“A knee replacement is indicated to relieve pain and restore function for a patient who has severe arthritis (loss of the normal cartilage cushion) in the

knee,” explains Dr. Brett J. Gilbert of Triangle Orthopaedic Associates.

“Cartilage on the ends of the bones in the knee is like icing on a cake. When that icing is worn away, that is what arthritis is. The loss of that cartilage cushion in the knee means that the bones grind together, creating pain and inflammation, stiffness and swelling, making it difficult to get around.”

While pain management may offer some relief, a full or partial knee replacement can provide a long-term solution. With a total knee replacement, the damaged surfaces of the joint are removed and are replaced by a metal and plastic joint that is attached to the leg bones and kneecap with bone cement. With a partial knee replacement, only portions of the joint are replaced, which preserves the other healthy areas of the knee.

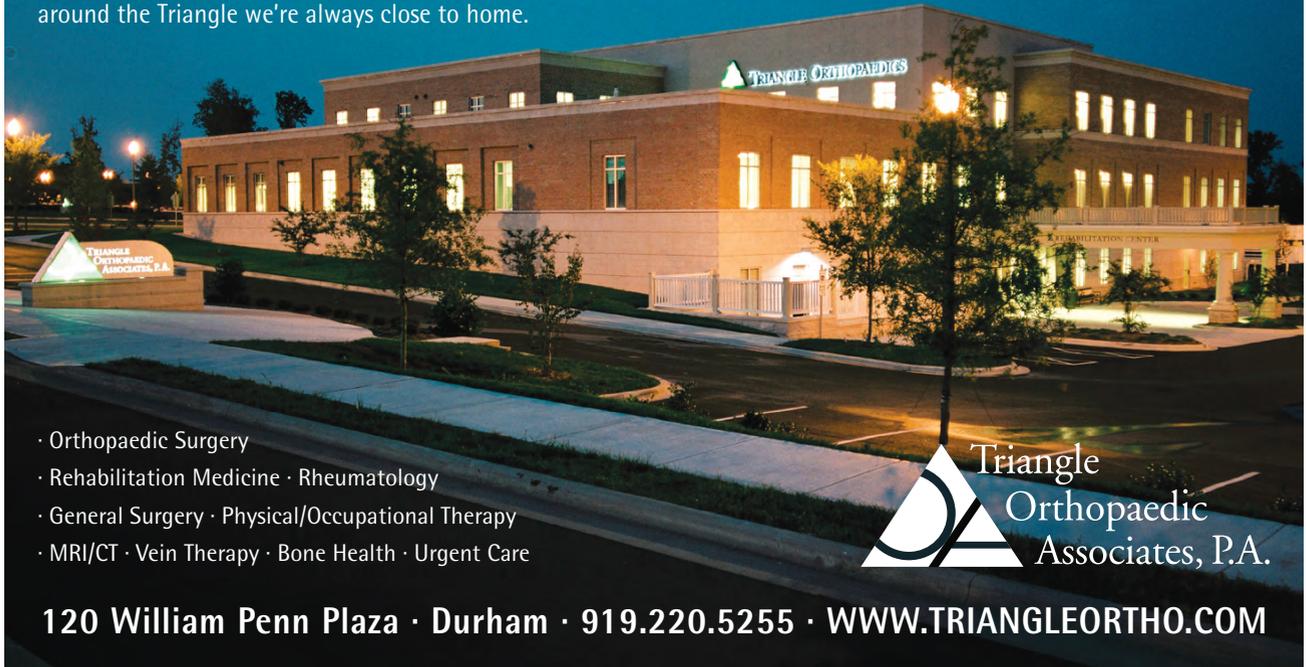
“Partial knee replacements are a great option for patients who have arthritis that is localized to just one area in the knee, rather than having to replace the entire knee,” Gilbert says. “Patients who have a partial knee replacement generally recover more quickly, and their knee feels more natural to them after surgery (more like a normal knee) because they have kept most of their own knee.”

On the other hand, Gilbert says, “For patients who have arthritis throughout the entire knee, a full knee replacement using a minimally invasive technique is a great option for relieving pain and restoring better function.” Surgery is usually recommended when patients experience severe knee pain or stiffness that limits their everyday activities, moderate or severe knee pain while resting, chronic knee inflammation or swelling, worsening knee deformity, or failure to respond

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to other treatment methods such as medication.

Though some pain is involved with either a partial or a full knee replacement surgery, pain management strategies are employed in order to minimize discomfort throughout the process, including recovery.

“Multimodal pain management along with minimally invasive surgical techniques help patients to recover more quickly and comfortably after knee replacement surgery,” Gilbert says. “The surgery itself is done with spinal anesthesia (rather than general anesthesia)

along with other medications that allow patients to sleep comfortably during the procedure. During surgery, a special long-acting numbing medication is placed into the knee, which provides three days of ongoing pain relief after the procedure. After surgery, additional pain medications are given to minimize discomfort, and other medications are given to prevent nausea.”

Recovery from the procedure is usually very quick. “Patients get up out of bed and start walking the same day that their surgery is performed,” Gilbert says. “Patients typically just stay in the hospital for a few days and then

go home. Some patients with a desk job can go back to work after just a few weeks, while others may choose to wait four to six weeks.”

Most people will not need additional surgery, but it depends on your personal circumstances.

“If you stay healthy and active and live a long life, you can outlive your knee replacement,” Gilbert says. “If the knee replacement wears out, additional surgery may be needed to repair it. On average, nine out of ten patients will still have a well-functioning knee replacement 20 years after surgery.” 🍎