

Osteoarthritis of the hip

*Information for patients
considering surgery*

Arthritis of the hip is common and affects approximately 10% of the population.

The most common cause is Osteoarthritis, but there are numerous other causes relating to development of your hip as a child or specific injuries.

This leaflet explains the steps that can be taken to treat arthritis of the hip.

Treatment

Hip arthritis is never life threatening. The main aim of treatment is therefore symptomatic for pain and to try to keep mobility and range of movement of the joint.

Treatment follows a progression from simple measures to major surgical intervention.

Simple measures

Exercise

Non-impact exercise such as walking, swimming and cycling keeps muscle strength and tone. Hip joint stretches to keep the hip supple are beneficial. A consultation with a physiotherapist for education and a home exercise program can be useful.

Walking stick

Using a walking stick in the opposite hand to the affected hip reduces load in the hip and usually increases your walking distance. A strong stick of correct length with a non-slip rubber end is best.

Paracetamol

A simple but safe analgesic when used correctly. Often needs to be used 3 or 4 times a day (2 x 500mg tablets on each occasion). Most people can safely use this for prolonged periods at these doses.

Natural remedies

Often not proven but some people gain relief from various naturopathic potions, magnets, acupuncture and the like. This affect may be placebo but some plant substances have proven anti-inflammatory effects. You should check the use of these with your local Doctor as some may react with other medicines or be dangerous.

Fish oils

Have been associated with some improvement in cartilage quality and may be beneficial.

Anti-inflammatories (NSAID's)

Several types of Non steroidal anti-inflammatories are available. They can be very effective in reducing pain and swelling associated with osteoarthritis. All these medications have potential side effects and are not always tolerated.

The most common effects are: exacerbating asthma, stomach upset (ulcers etc), increased blood pressure and ankle swelling.

Weight loss

There is no doubt that if you are above ideal weight, weight loss can have a significant impact in reducing pain from osteoarthritis. Weight loss can also reduce the risk of anaesthetic complications and wound healing. Many people after losing weight no longer need surgery for their Osteoarthritis. You may be given an ideal weight to attain prior to consideration for surgery. Consulting your practice nurse may be beneficial.

Injections

A hip injection is often used by your specialist to differentiate between back pain and hip joint pain. An injection is given to 'numb' the hip and you then keep a record of the pain experienced. Sometimes steroids are used to provide longer relief of pain. The procedure is done under X-ray guidance with a small risk of infection.

Before you consider surgery

- Ensure you have considered all simple methods to control your pain
- Remember surgery has significant risks attached
- Surgery can be painful
- Patients have to work hard with physiotherapy to achieve optimal results
- Smoking greatly increases the risk of complications during and after surgery. for support with stopping smoking contact your GP, pharmacist or the North Yorkshire Stop Smoking Service on 0845 8770025
- Not all patients are entirely satisfied with surgery

About surgery

Surgery is only considered when previous options have been exhausted.

Hip replacement

This is only considered when non-operative options have been exhausted. It involves replacing the worn out ball and socket joint with an artificial one. It usually provides lasting pain relief with improved function. About 3% of these hips will fail in the first 10 years, some quite quickly from infection and loosening, the other 97% should last beyond 10 years. There is a 1% risk of infection, 1% risk of dislocation and a 0.2% risk of death from blood clot in the lungs.

If your hip replacement fails it can be re-done (revised). This is a bigger operation, requires a longer recovery time but is still successful

Summary

Start with a regular exercise / walking program and good shoe wear. Take simple pain killers and by all means try 'natural remedies' if you wish. If and when 'something needs to be done' your GP can guide you through the options available.

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