

MEDICAL MONDAYS | News Notes

Dr. Thomas Gautsch | Orthopedic Surgery

TOPIC: Outpatient Knee Replacement

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Understanding Outpatient Knee Replacement

What is Outpatient Total Knee Replacement?

Total knee replacement is the surgical treatment for knee arthritis, where the damaged knee is removed and replaced with an artificial knee implant.

Traditionally performed as an inpatient procedure, total knee replacement surgery is now being conducted on an outpatient basis, allowing patients to go home the same day of the surgery.

This is made possible with recent advances such as:

- Improved perioperative anesthesia
- Minimally invasive techniques
- Initiation of rehabilitation protocols soon after surgery.

Is a short-stay knee replacement right for you?

Outpatient total knee replacement is now being performed in select centers on select patients who are healthy enough to be candidates for this pathway. These surgeries can be done at an ambulatory surgery center or an inpatient hospital.

- **Orthopedic surgeons agree that outpatient total knee replacement should only be done on patients who**
 - Are healthy enough to have surgery in such a setting.
 - Have the appropriate home setting/support to allow them to be discharged in this manner.
 - Have stable vital signs such as heart and respiratory rate, blood pressure and temperature during their post-operative physical therapy session.
 - Are able to maintain pain control with oral medication.
 - Can tolerate a regular diet before being discharged on the same day of surgery.

Know your health care team

The entire health care team for an outpatient total knee replacement must be adept at managing this type of surgical pathway.

- Your **primary care provider** will need to agree that you are medically able to tolerate the surgery.

- The **orthopedic surgeon** then must deem that you are a candidate for outpatient total knee replacement and feel comfortable doing the surgery in this manner.
- The **anesthesiologists** should be skilled at multimodal pain management techniques to ensure your safety, pain management and quick recovery.
- The **nursing team** must be skilled at preoperative education, operating room workflow, rapid recovery, and be able to assess your readiness for discharge.
- Your **family or friends** must also be educated about what to expect at home and about recognizing potential postoperative complications.
- Furthermore, an open line of communication with your healthcare team and providers must be established pre-operatively to relay information regarding your condition when you are home.

Advantages

- The Advantages of outpatient knee replacement include:
 - A reduced hospital stay
 - A possible reduced chance for hospital acquired infections
 - The possibility of increased patient satisfaction.
 - There is also potential for reduced cost to the health care system.

You may be a candidate for outpatient knee replacement procedure if:

- An orthopedic surgeon has advised that you need a knee replacement
- No severe bone loss around the knee
- No prior history of open surgery on the knee to be operated
- Your weight is in proportion to your height

Should you Have Knee Replacement Surgery?

If you're in a lot of pain when you walk or get up from a chair, and you can't keep up with your daily activities, you might wonder: Should I think about knee replacement surgery?

More than 700,000 in the U.S. get it done every year. And most of them get big-time pain relief and can go back to their everyday life. Does that mean surgery is for everyone with knee problems?

How to Make a Decision

- **Pain, swelling, and stiffness.**
It might be time for surgery if it hurts so much when you walk or go up and down stairs that it's hard to get through your day. Another sign is that your knee is painful at night or even when resting.
- **Other treatments didn't work**
- **Knee deformity.**
If your knee is bowlegged, knock-kneed or won't go straight anymore is a good indication that it's time for surgery.

- **Quality of life.**

If your pain limits what you can do every day, you may want to talk to a surgeon.

When Knee Surgery May Not Be for You

- **Infections**

Make sure you get them treated before surgery. For instance, take care of gum infections. It will lower the chance of getting an infection in your knee.

- **Other medical problems.**

Do you have heart or lung problems, diabetes, or blood clots? It may raise the chances of complications from your surgery. You'll need to get these under control before you can make a decision about knee replacement.

- **Other reasons for your joint trouble.**

Is your knee really causing your pain? Sometimes people with bad hip arthritis have pain in the knee. Work with your doctor to make sure you've found the real reason you hurt. If you don't, your knee may still bother you just as much months after surgery.

How to Prepare for Knee Replacement

- **Plan early.** Even before you set a date, think about how an operation will affect your life. Things may be stressful after joint replacement for at least a few weeks. Preparing now will make it smoother.
- **Ask questions.** Don't be afraid to get the specifics from your doctor. How long will the surgery take? What type of anesthesia will you need? What kind of rehab will you get? Should you bank blood before the procedure? How long will you likely be out of work? Write down the answers. Better yet, have a trusted friend or family member come to your appointment to take notes.
- **Exercise.** If possible, try to get in better shape before your surgery. If you're physically fit, you'll have a faster recovery time. Ask your doctor which exercises you should do before the operation. If you improve your upper body strength, it will make it easier for you to use crutches or a walker.
- **Tweak your lifestyle.** If you smoke, try to quit or cut down. Smoking can slow down recovery and wound healing. If you're heavy, make an effort to drop a few pounds before your surgery. Losing weight will reduce the stress on your new knee and help you heal. Smoking and obesity both raise the risk of complications with joint replacement surgery.
- **Start practicing.** Before surgery, learn what sorts of physical therapy exercises you'll need afterward. Try them out. If you get used to them now, they'll be easier to do later. If you'll need crutches or a walker, give them a test drive, too.
- **Write down all your medical info.** Make a list of the medicines and supplements you take, any health conditions you have, your insurance information, your doctors' names, and whom to contact in an emergency. Lots of different people will be asking you about these things in the coming weeks. It's helpful to have a note that you can show them.
- **Line up help.** You're going to need it while you recover. So make a plan now. If

you live on your own, could a relative or close friend stay with you for a while? How about a neighbor to take out the garbage or bring in the mail? You may want to stock up on packaged foods -- or make extra meals that you freeze for later.

- **Get your home ready.** Adjust things in your house so it will be easy to get around when you're less mobile. You might need to set up a temporary bedroom on the first floor. Clear your hallways so you can navigate them with crutches or a walker. Consider installing safety rails in the bathroom. Make sure everything you need -- from your phone to your coffee maker -- is easy to reach.
- **Follow instructions.** Your doctor will give you details about what you need to do in the few days before surgery. You may need to stop taking some medications, especially ones that could lead to increased bleeding during surgery. Get all of the specifics and mark them down on a calendar so you don't forget.

FOR APPOINTMENTS or FURTHER INFORMATION

Dr. Thomas Gautsch

Southern Sports Medicine Institute

<http://www.southern-sports.com>

615-452-3320

Dr. Thomas L. Gautsch, a Johns Hopkins Med and UCLA-educated, fellowship-trained, shoulder and knee surgeon, board-certified in both orthopedic and sports surgery; additionally, holds a degree in bio-engineering. His practice is solely focused on the surgical repair and replacement of knees and shoulders. As one of the founders of the Indian Lake Surgery Center in Hendersonville, a state-of-the-art outpatient surgical facility, was vital to accommodate the outpatient total joint replacement and spine surgery patients. Dr. Gautsch has of the largest experiences in the region with minimally invasive, computer-assisted outpatient shoulder and knee surgery; including one of the largest patient series of successful outpatient total knee replacement outcomes in Tennessee.