

Minimally Invasive Knee Replacements

October of 2005, my Mother had double knee replacement surgery. At 81, after a life of hard work, her knees wore out! She suffered increasingly debilitating pain for years and required too much pain medication, just to get through every day. The side effects of the pain medications were causing damage to her stomach and other nasty symptoms.

I researched knee replacement techniques and surgeons online. She scheduled with two different surgeons, using two different techniques, earlier, but both times experienced other health problems, forcing her to cancel. She was not very satisfied, either of those times, with the techniques but felt they were the best option at the time.

Then one of my clients told me her sister had a double hip replacement, and recovered quickly and was happy with the doctor and procedure. I immediately went home to my computer and looked him up! I was impressed with what I found. This was not like any of the other procedures I had researched so I printed everything and passed it on to Mom.

We both knew we had found the right place, at last, during our first visit with Dr. Mears. He looked at her x-rays and explained that her knee joints had deteriorated until there was no cartilage to cushion between the bones. No wonder they hurt! We felt his kindness and compassion as he thoroughly explained his procedure and the effects. His confidence was contagious and when he said he could, and would, do both knees at the same time, we were delighted and scheduled as soon as possible.

She was in terrible pain, during the journey to UPMC Shadyside Hospital in Pittsburgh, on the day of the surgery! She used no pain medication for the last week and her knees throbbed even while sitting. It was a relief to get her into a bed for pre-op! The pain management team came in and inserted tiny IV-like catheters into the large nerves in the front and back of her thighs. As soon as the Novocain-like medication started, her pain ended. The anesthesiologist gave her a spinal anesthetic and they wheeled her off to the operating room where they gave her sedation.

It was a LONG wait for me, but actually only about two hours, until the doctor told me the surgery was finished and everything went well. When I first saw her in her room after recovery, I was amazed! Because she had only sedation instead of general anesthesia, and the nerve blocks in her legs were managing the pain instead of drugs, she was wide-awake and alert, pink cheeked and happy! The first thing she told me was that she felt a lot better than she had that morning! Wow!

The next morning when the doctor removed the bandages I was awed to see her incisions. They were only about five inches long, straight, and glued together firmly! The incision looked so good with no ugly or painful stitches or staples!

She spent three days at Shadyside. While they got her up and started her therapy, they gradually decreased the strength of the nerve blocks and increased the oral pain medication as needed. The fourth morning, the pain blocks removed, she transferred by ambulance to the Indiana Regional Medical Center for rehabilitation, to be close to home.

After one week of physical therapy, she came home walking! She refused the narcotic pain medication the second day of therapy because the small amount of discomfort she had disappeared with Tylenol! She grudgingly used the walker, at my insistence, to get from the car into her house but I do not think she used it much after that. She took it slow and easy, rested a lot and did her exercises daily but she was home, walking, and returning to her normal life.

She says nothing hurt, after the surgery, as bad as what she suffered on the WAY TO the hospital that Monday!

If you, or someone you know needs knee replacement, research carefully. If you are close enough to get to Pittsburgh, I highly recommend Dr. Dana Mears and UPMC Shadyside. If not, look for a surgeon who uses similar techniques.

- The small incision and having the muscles pushed aside, rather than cut, makes healing and rehabilitation much faster and easier.
- The spinal anesthetic with sedation is much easier on the patient and much safer, with much less danger of stroke or heart attacks.
- The nerve blocks allow the patient to get through the first few, the worst, days after surgery with little pain and far fewer drugs.

Joint replacement techniques have improved dramatically! There are even gender specific replacements that serve the body's needs better. If you need to have it done, do not procrastinate, and suffer, because of fear. Research thoroughly; make an informed choice and walk away happy – like my Mom!

Patricia Kenworthy July 2006