

Maintaining your total hip and knee

Why should a hip or knee need to be redone?

This is a common question and is understandable, given the history of joint replacement failures a generation ago. Yet, 50% of TOTAL HIPS done 30 years ago did not need to be replaced – even with old implants, poor plastic, and radical surgical techniques! The current generation of implant and bearing surfaces should give excellent results in over 90% of patients for 25 years and more!

TOTAL KNEES have had even better results and continue to do well.

The common lay-person impression is that total joints only “last” 10 years; this is totally and completely wrong!

Two important changes have been made in hip and knee replacement surgery:

1. **Standardized implants with improved materials**
2. **MANDATORY follow-up appointments for life!**

Dr Irving considers a total joint to be a **chronic condition**. He likens it to a patient with high blood pressure or diabetes requiring regular maintenance. Total joints are mechanical devices in a biological environment – they have demonstrated a remarkable endurance. However, changes can occur in all implants and bearing surfaces. Most of the time, wearing down of the bearing surface (a precursor to loosening) has no symptoms until after a major problem has occurred. With regularly scheduled x-rays, a minor problem can be identified and corrected with, at worst, a minor operation; versus a major problem requiring a major operation. If a plastic bearing wears out after 15 years or more, this is not a failure of the operation and means that the patient had a successful operation that permitted them to function at a normal high level for years! As described above, however, if the plastic wears out, left unchecked, the implant pieces fixed to bone can come loose. This situation needs to be avoided and prevented!

A typical post-op course involves exam and x-rays at 6 weeks, 3 months, and 1 year from the date of surgery. Then, follow-up exams are yearly for the first 5 years and every 2 years thereafter.