



Obesity and Total Joint Replacement

What is the definition of obesity?

Obesity is defined as BMI (Body Mass Index) greater than 30. BMI is a widely used method for estimating body fat. BMI is calculated using a person's height and weight.

Does size matter?

The patient's weight and body shape have a lot to do with the success of the joint replacement. The size of the knee or hip determines the length of the incision, the difficulty of the exposure, the ease of putting the implants in correctly, and the amount of time spent in surgery.

Does obesity increase the risk of the operation?

Obesity does increase the risk of the operation. Obese patients have a higher risk of infection, blood clots, wound complications, nerve injuries, and blood loss. Obese patients also have a higher risk of malposition of the implants, loosening, dislocation, and stiffness. Pretty much any complication that can happen is more likely in obese patients. To make matters worse, when complications do occur, they are more difficult to treat or correct in obese patients.

Do obese patients lose weight after the joint replacement?

No, most do not. Contrary to what you would think, study after study has shown that most obese patients actually gain weight in the years following the joint replacement.

How can one decrease the risk of surgery?

You can decrease the risk of complications by maybe 2000% by having surgery with a BMI under 40, so as a rule we do not do joint replacements on patients with a BMI over 40. A BMI under 35 is even better for elective surgery. We also typically need you to be medically cleared by your primary care doctor and/or relevant specialists, whether you are obese or not.

Is weight loss important pre-operatively?

Weight loss really helps. Joint replacement is elective. Most patients have time to lose weight and improve their health before undergoing surgery. It is important to remember that weight reduction is a good thing. We care about you and your health. We are doing you a favor to insist on weight reduction before joint replacement if your BMI is over 40. The consequences of complications can be devastating. We can refer you to expert specialists that can assist you achieving in your weight reduction goals even while you are dealing with worn out hips and knees. It can be the start of getting your life back.