

Health & Wellness News

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Hip, Hip Hooray *Total joint replacement brings total joy.*

Kenneth Lynch is no stranger to pain.

The 61-year-old resident of Londonderry, NH, has arthritis in his hips, knees and back. "In the summer of 2008 things got so bad that I had to crawl up the stairs to my bedroom," says Lynch. "As time went on, I could hardly walk."

Lynch's primary care physician gave him painkillers and suggested he consider joint replacement surgery.

"It sounded like a good idea," says Lynch, who unfortunately had lost his health insurance after a layoff in January 2008. "When my PCP said I should meet with Dr. Healy at Lahey Clinic, I made an appointment."

Lynch met William Healy, MD, chair of the Orthopaedic Surgery Department at Lahey, in December 2008.

"I liked him right away," recalls Lynch.

The arthritis in Lynch's hips was so bad at that point that his bones had fused together. Healy gave Lynch materials to read about hip replacement and told him that while it was not an absolute requirement, without it, he would continue to have limited mobility and pain. "His confidence gave me confidence," says Lynch, who decided to move forward with the surgery.

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About Total Joint Replacement Surgery at Lahey

Joint replacement surgery is a Center of Excellence within Lahey's Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. Experienced, subspecialized joint replacement surgeons provide replacement of arthritic hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, elbows and wrists. Lahey orthopaedic surgeons are skilled in the most advanced surgical approaches, utilize computerized surgical navigation, and implant state-of-the-art joint prostheses. Lahey's orthopaedic surgeons perform more than 1,000 total joint replacements each year.

"Total joint replacement is one of the most successful medical interventions of the last 50 years," says Healy. "Demand for joint replacement surgery is increasing because it has very good clinical results as measured by pain relief and improved function, and people want to remain active as they age."

Healy explains that joint replacement surgery, also known as total joint arthroplasty, is an elective procedure, performed only after patients have tried nonoperative treatments such as pain and anti-inflammatory medications, and physical therapy. Such nonoperative treatment can help many patients delay or avoid joint replacement.

"The demand for joint replacement is rising and most joint replacement patients have terrific outcomes," says Healy. "But total joint replacement is major surgery and people should know that going into it."

Replacing a Hip

The hip is a ball-and-socket joint. It is composed of two parts: the round head of the femur bone (the ball) and the acetabulum in the pelvis (the cup or

socket). In a normal hip joint, these two bones are coated with smooth articular cartilage that allows them to move against each other without friction or pain. In an arthritic hip, such as Lynch's, the smooth cartilage is destroyed. Bone rubs against bone in the joint, causing pain, stiffness and limitation of function.

Total hip replacement surgery replaces an arthritic hip joint with an artificial hip joint, composed of a ball and socket. The ball is attached to a femoral stem, which is fixed into the shaft of the femur or thigh bone. The socket, or acetabular cup, is secured to the pelvis. Once in place, the artificial ball and socket function like a natural hip.

"How long a joint replacement will last depends on factors such as age, weight and activity level," says Healy. "Patients should expect 10 years and hope for 20 years. If the joint replacement becomes loose or wears out over time, it can be fixed with a revision operation."

Lynch had his first hip replacement at Lahey in May 2009. "Everyone at Lahey made me feel comfortable," says Lynch. "I felt like I was just going to get a haircut! After the surgery, the nurses and nurses' aides were so gentle and patient with me...it made it easier to take challenges."

Three months later, in August, Lynch returned to Lahey to have his other hip replaced. "It couldn't have gone better," he says. "The first day I was up and walking, and by the third day I was climbing stairs."

After three months of physical therapy, Lynch is now getting around quite well, although he still has arthritis in his back and knees. "I'm considering a total knee replacement at Lahey next," says Lynch. "Whatever Dr. Healy thinks is best—that's what I'm going to do!"

To learn more about total joint replacement and Lahey's Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, visit www.lahey.org/orthopaedics. To make an appointment, call 781-744-8638.