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There's No Need To Live In Chronic Pain When It Comes To Joints



When the pain in his knee began to alter how Peter Liber was living his life, he knew it was time to do something drastic. In an interview with [MobilizeCanada](#), Peter shared that the problem was, at 47 years old, he was at least a decade away from what his family doctor considered age appropriate for a partial knee replacement. Peter, who had given up walking with his wife and his dog, and was avoiding stairs because of the chronic pain, felt differently. After two decades of multiple surgeries,

braces and Hyaluronic acid shots to ease the constant ache of bone-on-bone grinding in his left knee, he had descended into a morose state that was severely limiting his quality of life. He finally insisted that his family doctor give him a referral to an orthopaedic surgeon who specialized in knee replacements.

"I was living in agony; my joint had deteriorated to the point it was causing me horrendous pain," said Liber. "I had reached the point where I could not deal with it anymore."

His general practitioner acquiesced and gave him the referral to an orthopaedic surgeon in October. By the end of November he had an appointment with the specialist and surgery was scheduled for the end of January.

That year, Liber's partial knee replacement was one of 37, 943 knee replacements performed in Canada. Luckily for Peter, he beat the median wait time for males who underwent a knee replacement, which was 173 days in 2006-2007. Today the median wait times have improved significantly to 120 days, a 15 percent reduction in just four years ago.

But the problem is not the standard pre-surgery wait times for most people suffering from chronic knee or joint degeneration, which most often caused by osteoarthritis. The problem is they simply wait too long to insist on referrals to specialists to see if they are a candidate for a partial or full joint replacement.

There are several reasons behind this says Liber, who has gone on to be part of the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation's peer patient counselling program, "Ortho Connect". Most people who are candidates for the knee surgery, whether it's minimally invasive arthroscopic surgery or a more complex full knee joint replacement, are simply scared of what will happen to them during and after surgery.

It's one thing to have your doctor or surgeon tell you the facts, but they haven't had the surgery themselves so they can't really tell you what it's like, says Liber. By being



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available to have phone conversations with patients scheduled for knee surgery, Liber and other peer counsellors can share their personal experience, from their point of view.

“Most people want to know if it hurts, how long it will take before they can walk, or drive or ski,” said Liber.

For many people, the prospect of knee or hip surgery seems daunting and is a last resort option, so they end up accepting a poor quality of life steeped in joint pain for many years. Often their family doctor has warned them that joint replacements don't last more than 10 or 15 years and if they get it “too young” they will need another surgery at some point. This makes them to delay making the decision even longer, hoping to “get by” with just one joint surgery in life. But this ensures they are living in pain, which is not a healthy choice. When they finally do have the surgery, most patients regret waiting for so long, says Liber.

Waiting too long for surgery has its consequences. There are established waiting lists for knee replacement surgery across Canada, with a goal of having surgery performed within 26 weeks of the decision to treat by the specialist and the actual start of treatment. But add up the complete wait time (e.g., the time to see a specialist and/or the time waiting to have diagnostic testing), and the total wait can be much longer. For those in severe pain, the consequences of delayed treatment can lead to abandoned activities, altered relationships, reduced or modified work, prolonged sick leave and even job loss, according to the 2009 Hip and Knee Replacement report by the Canadian Joint Replacement Registry.

Surgical wait times begin with the decision to treat by the specialist

Fortunately the advances in knee replacement surgery have allowed for smaller incisions and faster recoveries. Arthroscopy is a surgical procedure that allows the surgeon to look at the inside of a joint in your body through a viewing instrument called an arthroscope. Though some arthroscopic procedures can add short-term relief for a patient with an osteoarthritic joint disease, hip or knee athroplasty has the potential to provide person years of improved quality of life.

Chronic knee or hip pain affects a person's entire life. Liber's knee was so painful that he basically stopped participating in anything that required mobility. “Chronic pain changes a person,” says Liber.

Today, five years after his partial knee replacement, Liber is leading a full and active life. His wife credits his partial knee replacement to “giving her husband back.”

Yet he knows his right knee, which has been causing him some concern, needs to be addressed. He says he will again insist his family doctor refer him to the same specialist sooner rather than later because he knows what a positive difference a working, pain-free knee is in life. He's not going to wait this time. Feeling good is too precious to him.

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