

# Explore your knee surgery options

By Melissa Erickson

Based on an interview with Rajesh K. Jain, MD, MPH, FAAOS, FAAHKS,  
Reconstructive Orthopedics

It used to be that when people had knee replacement surgery, they were looking to rid themselves from constant pain and continue into their senior years with a relatively sedentary lifestyle.

But for boomers, knee surgery means getting more out of life, and the newest forms of knee replacement are allowing them to do just that.

There's a soaring demand for knee replacements from boomers "who want to live life to the fullest," said Dr. Rajesh Jain, an expert in minimally invasive total hip and knee replacement at Virtua Joint Replacement Institute, Voorhees, N.J. "As the technology has improved, the demand for what people want has, too.

"Boomers played harder, worked harder and later and had children later. With knee replacements they don't want to compromise. They want quality of life in addition to being free from pain."

Unlike their parents who retired and took it easy, boomers "want to get it (knee replacement) done and get back to work. People are much more active now than they were a generation ago," Jain said. "They hike. They ski. They have second careers."

## Newer technique

Advances in minimally invasive knee surgery have optimized the procedure so that it has become a much less traumatic surgery, said orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Stiehl, who is in solo practice in southern Illinois. "For anyone over 50, a knee replacement should last them 25 years," Stiehl said.

While 70 to 80 percent of people still opt for the more traditional surgery, Jain said, minimally invasive knee replacement uses a smaller incision and less cutting of the tissue surrounding the knee. The goal is the same in

both surgeries, but with minimally invasive surgery the surgeon avoids cutting into the tendons of the quadricep, where much of the power of the knee comes from. The quadricep is the part of the knee responsible for bending the hip and straightening the knee.

"Studies have found that strength (in the knee) returns quicker" with minimally invasive surgery and also lasts longer, Jain said. "You'll have more strength and a quicker return to function. You're doing less damage with a shorter incision, but you're getting the same results. There's less pain, not as big a scar, less blood loss and the range of motion returns faster."

Another plus for this kind of surgery is a shorter hospital stay, Stiehl said. "Typically a patient is up on their feet that night (same day of surgery), walking the next day and out (of the hospital) within two days," Stiehl said.

## Who can benefit

The typical candidate for knee surgery has changed over time, with younger people now seeking replacements.

"Age is no longer a criteria. The criteria is quality of life," Jain said. "Knee replacement is an elective procedure, and it's something to think about when a person cannot do the things he likes to do. When other nonsurgical, noninvasive treatments don't help or when the pain begins to affect your life negatively, it's time to consult a surgeon."

There are a few drawbacks to minimally invasive surgery, which has been compared to repairing a car engine via the muffler rather than opening the hood. Because it is a difficult procedure, "be sure to use a surgeon who is an expert in the field," Stiehl said. "It's a big operation." It is not suggested for patients who are heavy-set or very muscular, have severe knee instability or deformity, or require a more complex replacement.