

What are the advantages of minimally invasive surgery for knee replacement?

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The information provided in this article is meant to inform the patient on Minimally Invasive Surgery for knee replacement. Your orthopedic surgeon should explain to you which knee replacement is best for you and why.

The term "minimally invasive surgery" (MIS) has gained currency in recent years due to the advances in surgical methods and computer-assisted medical technology. Doctors, implant companies, and hospitals use the term to refer to several different strategies and procedures. Many of these strategies and procedures are aimed at performing knee replacement through smaller incisions. By reducing the size of the incision, the surgeon is able to reduce the damage to the underlying structure of the knee, which in turn, does less injury to the patient. However, always remember that the size of the incision will be dictated by the size of the implants and the need to be able to manipulate them inside the joint to get the optimal positioning. Getting accurate positioning is key to the success of the entire procedure.

Some of these strategies and procedures closely resemble the existing techniques in knee replacement surgery that have been used for years. Therefore the term can be misleading. An article put out by the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine reads:

"Many of the so-called minimally invasive procedures are simply variations of existing techniques to implant total knees, except that they are done through smaller incisions. Other techniques are genuine advances that go much beyond just making a smaller skin cut. The ultimate goal is not only to make a shorter skin cut, but also to reduce deep muscle trauma associated with surgery, such that pain is lessened, discharge is expedited, and the need for prolonged physical therapy is reduced."

If your orthopedic surgeon has training and experience in MIS, there can be several advantages to going with this new surgical technique. However, it is important to note that not every patient's situation will allow for the procedure. In the case where the surgeon is experienced and the patient's situation allows for MIS, then this may be an option to consider.

Dr. Bal, Associate Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the University of Missouri Health Sciences Center, writes, "In experienced hands, these procedures have superb short term outcomes, with faster recovery, less pain, and shorter down time. But not all surgeons can deliver these results. Research the issue, ask questions, speak with your surgeon, carefully weigh your options, ask more questions, kick the tires, and make a decision."

Clearly, the advantages of MIS knee replacement surgery involve short-term results. This includes an "earlier discharge from the hospital, less pain, and a faster return to day-to-day activities" (University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine). In addition, "The need for physical therapy following surgery is minimized by techniques that reduce trauma to the skin, muscles, and tendons" (U of M-C).

While MIS surgical procedures may reduce some risks and complications associated with traditional knee replacement s, they may also introduce new ones. MIS is by no means "risk-free". Nevertheless, the new techniques, causing less injury to the body, a shortened recovery time, and greater short-term results, continue to position MIS as a method of surgery worth considering.