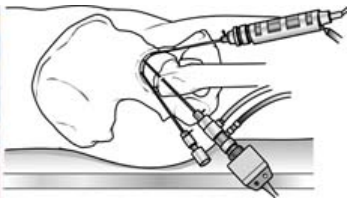

UOS
University Orthopaedic Surgeons

Arthritis

Arthritis affects over 75 million Americans per year – around 300,000 hip replacements are done each year to deal with this disabling condition. Arthritis is defined by the breakdown of the cartilage lining joint surfaces, causing pain and stiffness. Breakdown and degeneration of the joint can happen a number of different ways. Abnormal bony anatomy (trauma, FAI) can damage the labrum surrounding the hip and the adjacent cartilage. If these issues are left unchecked, irreversible damage to the joint surfaces may result. Some inflammatory conditions (rheumatoid arthritis) can cause gradual erosion of the joint surfaces.

In general, arthroscopy in the presence of arthritis is sometimes considered, especially for younger patients, if the x-rays do not show the joint to be too badly worn. Preserving the natural joint as long as possible is preferable, even though arthritis may continue to advance and the patient may eventually require a total hip replacement. While an artificial hip is superior to a painful, worn-out joint, it is not a normal hip and carries with it numerous concerns including the seriousness of the procedure, life-long precautions that are necessary with an artificial joint, and the possibility of the artificial joint becoming painful and requiring revision.

Arthroscopy is an attractive consideration as a procedure that could potentially preserve the natural joint, and it does not burn any bridges with regard to future options. Realistically, however, successful outcomes, in the presence of significant arthritis, have been reported only in upwards of 50% of cases with two-year follow-up and in only slightly greater than one third of these cases after five years. Arthroscopic debridement for arthritis may not be the solution to allow patients to resume a fully active lifestyle, but may simply be an alternative that reduces discomfort and preserves the natural joint for a while before contemplating a replacement. An added benefit of postponing a hip replacement is that the technology and materials for these artificial joints continue to improve.