

KNEE REPLACEMENTS FOR 77 YEAR OLD SKIER

I saw your recent articles in Silent Sports on joint replacements and avoiding surgery. I have not had any joint replacements but my father had knee replacements done and he is still XC skiing, golfing, exercising and gardening at 77 years of age. My father, Bill E Reifenrath, had both knees replaced in summer 2006. It took him about 2 months to gradually get back to walking normally. He was able to ski that winter season (2006-07) and this season. He had ongoing problems over the years with his knees and he reached a point where it had to be done. My Dad has been very active over the years: football, basketball, running, biking, XC classic skiing, and roller skiing. The cartilage was damaged and the leg bones were rubbing against each other. His surgery was a success and he is able to continue his active lifestyle. He is not totally pain free but he is more mobile.

Your recent article on avoiding joint replacement surgery was good and I am a firm believer in avoiding going under the knife unless all options are exhausted. Also, I want to mention acupuncture as an option for pain management. My wife is an acupuncturist in the Milwaukee area and she has treated patients knee pain, back pain, neck pain, etc. Acupuncture is great for getting your body back in balance. Also, another health balancing exercise that is growing in popularity is Qigong or ChiKung. It is similar to Tai Chi but is far easier. It is not a strict sequence of movements that tend to be taught in Tai chi classes, books, videos. I highly recommend this DVD:

Qigong for beginners: http://www.amazon.com/Qigong-Beginning-Practice-Beginners/dp/B00049QPII/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=dvd&qid=1205551473&sr=8-1

My wife has a website for more info on acupuncture:
www.healingneedleacupuncture.com

It was a great year XC skiing. We were blessed with plenty of snow. I also want to thank you for making the Secrets of Striding video. It has been very helpful to me in learning this technique.

Thanks,

Bill J Reifenrath
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VERY INTERESTING (AND EFFECTIVE) HIP REPLACEMENT Cause: Barefoot Waterskiing Accident

I learned to water ski when I was six years old; I could not get enough of it. The summer I graduated from high school (1978) I bought a ski boat and spent nearly every evening after work, and every weekend skiing. It was that fateful summer I taught myself to barefoot water ski. I soon became pretty good at it, learning new tricks and starts and, even teaching a few friends how to do it. I hungered for more, I wanted to learn how to barefoot backwards. This proved to be much more difficult.

While on vacation in Florida the winter of 1982 I visited Cypress Gardens to watch their world famous water ski show. I introduced myself to one of the skiers, and asked him if he knew of anyone I could take a lesson from. I was given the name of Ron Scarpa. Ron would go on to become national and world barefoot champion. I stayed in Winter Haven for two days and took lessons from Ron. Still thirsty for more I returned to Winter Haven that next summer, eager to learn the "deep water backwards barefoot start".

It's hard to describe, but if you can imagine lying in the water face down holding the ski rope handle behind your back with your feet pointing forward toward the boat and resting on the ski rope, the boat driver in a well orchestrated maneuver guns the boat forcing the skier under water. As the boat and skier pick up speed the skier pops up from underwater and places his/or her toes on the water and gradually stands up, leaning away from the boat. This is a spectacular start to watch and one that every barefooter wants to learn—which I did. I reveled in my new found start, doing it many times that day.

I should have left well enough alone my final day in Florida, but I wanted to barefoot more before I had to return home. I was tired from barefooting many hours the last few days. On what was to become my last deep water start of the trip I had a minor set back; I did the splits backwards at thirty mph. OUCH!! I got back in the boat with some difficulty. I was okay but very sore it was as if my right leg had kind of popped in and out of the hip socket or something. When barefooting you are subject to some brutal wipeouts, but you shrug them off and keep on going. That's what I did, I put up with the pain for a couple of weeks and forgot all about this incident until August of 1984.

I worked retail at the time and was on my feet on a concrete floor for up to ten hours a day. My right hip was starting to bother me. It was a

constant dull ache that radiated down my leg. I tried ibuprofen, but it really did not do anything. I went to my G.P. and he suggested that I see an orthopedist. The orthopedist took x-rays. I remember sitting in his office when the x-rays came back. He snapped them up on the viewer, and almost immediately said "look at this". Well, to me an x-ray is an x-ray I could not really see anything until he pointed it out. He showed me where the cartilage had narrowed between the femur head and the socket. You also noticed that the femur head was already showing signs of arthritis. I believe, as did my doctor, that the arthritis and degenerative cartilage was caused by my backwards barefooting accident. I was twenty-five.

For thirteen years I dealt with the pain—and many sleepless nights—relieving it with various means: intra articular injections, 800mg ibuprofen, cortisone shots, and an anti inflammatory medicine that required repeated blood tests. I hate needles too, by the way. I knew it was time for the replacement when none of these methods helped and my cycling friends would flip me shit on our training rides that my right knee was sticking out as though I was making a hard right hand turn. The hip had started to seize up. It was a very hard decision to make but one that could no longer be avoided .

January 10, 1997 a day that will live in infamy! The day I finally had my right hip replaced; I had just turned thirty-eight. I know a few people who have had both hips done at the same time. They deserve some type of medal. I was miserable. My week long stay in the hospital included such joyous occasions as: being catheterized after the surgery by an inexperienced aid, an enema, nausea, trying to shave while in bed and having the nurse come in and have a fit because I was on Coumadin (a blood thinner), and my favorite—my first step. I was scared to death.

I was actually surprised and how quickly I was able to get on the stationary bike. Within two weeks I was riding—albeit slowly. I can't say that I felt good though. I was still in pain, and I was literally sick from all the morphine, codeine, ibuprofen and whatever other medicine I had taken since the surgery. After about a month I finally felt as though I was going to make it and had made the right decision. I was off all medicine, and the pain was much less than pre surgery. I continued to ride my bike and lift weights. After all, I had some waterskiing to do in a few months.

There is bike tour called TOMRV witch stands for Tour of the Mississippi River Valley, it goes from Bettendorf, Iowa to Dubuque, Iowa and back in a single weekend, for a total of two hundred miles. I had not missed it in

five years, and it was a goal of mine to do it again this June 13th. If you have ever been to the Galena, Illinois area you know how hilly it is. After having labored up some of those hills, I loved blasting down them, tucking in and seeing how fast I could go.

Saturday had been a beautiful day, clear and sunny, a great day for a 103 mile bike ride. After a feast at the banquet that night, and a good night's sleep, I was ready for Sunday's return trip. My friend, Steve Goff and I left Dubuque early; again it was a beautiful day. We rode along leisurely at times and at times we rode hard. I soon learned a new meaning of hard.

At the time I was riding sew up tires. For those of you unfamiliar with sew ups, they are literally a sewn up tire with a piece of rim tape covering the stitch, then glued onto the rim with a very sticky, messy, gooey glue. At any rate Steve and I are riding along, Steve reaches for some Gu Gel out of his jersey pocket, and offers me some. I had never had it before; it was fairly new back then. He had been going on about how great it was, how it gave him so much energy. Well, I finally got mine choked down, we were riding on a nice flat stretch of road with a tailwind—I felt like Greg LeMond.

Goofing off, I said to Steve I can't believe how much energy that gave me, and at the same time I stood up in the peddles and started to sprint. Steve got on and was right behind me. I pulled away a little bit, and then it happened, there is a loud bang, I fly over my handlebars, I'm upside down looking up at Steve's horrified face, all I can think about is my hip, and this is going to hurt. I land on my new twenty-two thousand dollar titanium hip at twenty-five miles an hour. It all happened in the blink of an eye. Torn cycling shorts that had to be fixed with duct tape to hide my bloody butt, some ground off skin and hair, and a scratched up helmet and bike were the result of this crash. My hip was okay. I often think about what would have happened had my tire blown out on one of those steep down hills that I had previously found to be so invigorating.

June 26, 1997 another infamous day. I went waterskiing for the first time post surgery. I met my friend John, and my twin sister and her boyfriend after work at the Coralville Reservoir just outside of Iowa City. I was champing at the bit and everyone knew I was excited to ski, so they allowed me to go first. Life jacket and ski gloves on, I grabbed my slalom ski and jumped in. I put the ski on reached for the ski handle, and told John to take up the slack. I was ready, "let's go" I barked. John gave the Ski Nautique the gas and I was up. Crossing back and forth, one

hand cuts, jumping the wake, I had not missed a beat I could still ski like old times. So I thought.

I was really cutting it up and having a good time, but as in cycling, "what goes up must come down". I wiped out. Of all the near death wipe outs I have taken over the years this one did not even rate. There was no blood, no whiplash, and no broken bones or equipment; it was unspectacular. I simply took a spill. At first there was no pain, but I could tell that something was not right. The sight of my leg and knee at a peculiar angle ushered in pain never experienced before. This time I was not so lucky, I had dislocated my darn hip. Here I am bobbing up and down like an old piece of driftwood out in the middle of nowhere with the boat ramp miles away and thinking to myself, this is a bad deal.

As John idled the boat up to me, I was not moving much, just groaning. There was no need to ask if I was alright my faced showed it. My sister jumped in the water and swam to me I grunted that I thought I had dislocated my hip. We pondered how to get me in the boat. I told them there is no way I can get in the boat it's just too high. I guess if you decide to dislocate your hip while skiing, it's best to do it behind a Ski Nautique. They have a teak platform on the back that is nearly level with the water. I slithered on to this lifesaver. I suggested that they coil up a beach towel and have my sister's boyfriend hold on to one end and me the other to prevent myself from being washed off the platform. At that we began the torturously slow journey to the ramp.

My sister was on her cell phone calling 911. They dispatched an ambulance. When we arrived at the ramp the ambulance was not yet there. As a crowd gathered and the anxiety grew we heard sirens. The EMT quickly backed the ambulance to the waters edge, and the two of them bailed out of the cab. Without hesitating they grabbed a gurney from the back and waded into the water, boots and all, clear up to their knees. After securing me in the ambulance they gave me as much Morphine as they were allowed to, my sister jumped in the back with me and the second EMT and we headed for the hospital.

The EMT's were wonderful, very professional and compassionate, but I swear to god that the one driving hit every bump and pothole during the fifteen mile trip. You have to understand that here I am lying on my back with the EMT and myself trying to immobilize my contorted leg. To me it seems of no use, my leg is bouncing around in circles, and damn it hurts.

Finally the hospital was in sight, I must admit, a hospital never looked so

good. This great adventure had begun around six o'clock, now at the hospital it was eight o'clock. The emergency room doctor gave me additional morphine, and sent me for x-rays. They tried to contact my orthopedic surgeon, the one who had performed the hip replacement. I'm unsure of the details but I did not see him until the next morning.

The x-rays confirmed that indeed the hip was dislocated. I was wheeled to another room where I met the doctor who was going to perform the procedure. It's my understanding that the longer the joint stays displaced the more swelling occurs making it harder to reset. I still was in considerable discomfort and was given another medicine that made me comfortable and happy. While the doctor decided his plan of action I suddenly became more concerned with getting a date with one of the nurses than my predicament. How embarrassing; had to be the medicine!

The moment had arrived, five hours latter a small army of people swarmed the table I was on and held me down as the doctor gave my leg a bear hug. In one swift motion even in my drug induced state I felt instant relief. It was recommended that I spend the night at the hospital, I was starving and all that sounded good, was a pizza from Paglia's Pizza. At midnight my mom walked into my room with a Palace Special.

I slept pretty good that night, the nurse had just left after leaving my breakfast, when from down the corridor at the nurse's station I heard my orthopedist's booming voice cry—he is a large man, a Vietnam vet, with a big beard and a disheveled look—"he was doing what", he obviously had just learned of my folly. In my defense I told him that he never said I could not ski. It was suggested, however, that I not ski anymore. I had come to that conclusion anyway. I contacted a member of the University of Iowa Waterski Team and donated all my skis, ropes, wetsuits, and barefoot handles.

I left one kind of ski for another. I met my wife Staci in September of 1997' our life together found us living in Duluth. This is the start of our fifth year here. We love it. I still liked to cycle but there was a void where waterskiing used to be. Our first winter in Duluth we bought some cross-country skis, and soon the void would be filled. For the first two years we stuck with classic skis. Both of us were intrigued by skate skiing so last winter, early spring we bought skate skis when they went on sale. Last winter was a bad year for snow, not really receiving any until February.

We skied many new places chasing the snow. While at ABR in Michigan we took a skate ski lesson; we both really liked it. Fortunately, we were able to take a few more lessons before the snow melted.

Over the summer I had been having discomfort in my hip again and was worried something was wrong. I had not seen an orthopedist since leaving Iowa nearly six years ago. I thought it wise to have x-rays taken to make sure the hip was sound. To my relief, the orthopedist said my hip looked as good as the day it was installed. He attributed it to the fact that my old orthopedist had done a very good job, and that I skied, avoided high impact sports, and kept my weight down. He felt that the discomfort could be alleviated with physical therapy. It was obvious that it was not as strong, there was atrophy, and my balance was poor on my right leg. The physical therapy helped a great deal with balance and agility.

Staci and I had heard good things about roller skis. Thinking this would be a good way to get a jump on this winters skiing, we purchased some. The second time I used them, I thought I was better than I was. Going down a very small hill on the Munger-Shaw Trail, I lost control. As I fell I reached out with my pole, this exposed my right rib cage, and I broke a rib. The helmet, and knee and elbow guards sure saved a lot of skin though.

Entering this winter we both had the strong desire to improve. Staci was able to attend "Chicks on Sticks", an instructional ski weekend for women held at Giants Ridge. Staci's improvement was dramatic; she came home a different skier. She practiced her butt off, and decided to make her very first cross- country ski race the Nordic Spirit 10k classic at Spirit Mountain here in Duluth. She won. Her next race was the Korkki Classic, she finished a disappointing third. It was a great learning experience for her, however. She had over analyzed her wax, making the last minute decision to use *Start* wax tape. I'm glad it was her decision and not mine! She had absolutely no glide, more or less running the race with skis on.

Her third race being the American Birkebeiner Kortelopet Classic. Guess what? She won! One hour thirty minutes, she is so humble, and I'm so proud. Her goal for next year is to race the Birkebeiner Classic.

As for me my improvement is not as dramatic. I am very happy with my progress. There were only a handful of days I did not ski this winter. Each day I went out I would work on some part of my technique, and

each day my hip would feel stronger. I have taken lessons this winter from a few instructors, finally connecting with world famous and fabulous Antonina Anikin, she has been a joy to work with.

I can unequivocally say that my hip is the strongest and feels the best it has since before the hip replacement. Cross-country skiing has been great therapy for it. I'm grateful that it gives Staci and I the opportunity to stay healthy and enjoy the Minnesota winters together. I have already decided that cross-country skiing will be a life long activity for me. A tougher decision though, is, which do I like better, skate or classic. I hate decision like that. I know I can be sarcastic. As I said, I learned to water ski when I was six and could not get enough of it, I'm now forty-eight and I can't get enough of cross-country skiing.

Jay Gilpin