

## Choosing the Right Surgeon for You

Choosing the right surgeon to perform your joint replacement is important, and it can be a daunting task. There are several ways to find a surgeon who is right for you. A personal referral from your primary care doctor or friends and family that have experience with joint replacement are a few possibilities. Another form of referral would be through your medical insurance provider who may list preferred surgeons in their network. A third and powerful referral tool is the Internet.

Websites such as physician web pages, social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) as well as physician rating websites may help inform you in making the right choice. Below is a list of common resources that can be used to find your joint replacement surgeon along with the benefits and drawbacks of each. **In general, we recommend that you don't rely on just one way to evaluate and choose your surgeon**, but use some combination of available resources. The most important step in choosing your surgeon is meeting with him or her, developing a good patient-physician relationship and discussing your specific situation.

### Referral from your Physician

You may have seen another physician for your joint problem like your primary care physician or your rheumatologist. These physicians frequently are comfortable treating arthritis medically but will then refer you to a surgeon when they feel it is time to consider joint replacement. Typically, this initial doctor has a preferred surgeon, or group of surgeons, that they recommend you see. These physicians will typically send you to the surgeon they feel will do the best job for you. They likely have referred many people to this joint surgeon and have the benefit of seeing the overall care provided and how satisfied patients are after their joint replacements with them. It can be helpful to **ask about why the physician sends his or her patients to that surgeon**. It is also important for you to be comfortable with that surgeon and spend the time to get some independent information regarding their practice.

### Recommendation from Friends and Family

Many people will see a surgeon for their joint replacement based on a recommendation from someone they know who has had their joint replaced by that surgeon. This can be helpful because you get a first-hand account of their experience, their results and recovery. The potential drawbacks of finding a surgeon this way is that you only get the opinion of one person, and your situation and condition is unique to you. It's unlikely your experience will be exactly the same as the experience of the person you know. It's important to do your own research and meet with the surgeon to discuss your situation. Make sure you have the opportunity to establish a good relationship with the recommended surgeon.

## **Board Certification in Orthopaedic Surgery**

There are a series of steps a surgeon goes through upon finishing training in orthopaedic surgery to become Board certified. This certification is maintained over time through a rigorous process that ensures a surgeon remains up to date on knowledge and techniques. The goal of the process is to ensure that a board certified orthopaedic surgeon is deemed competent and safe to practice. It is a process that most, but not all, orthopaedic surgeons complete in order to practice. It is a requirement to be board-certified by most hospitals in the United States prior to being given privileges or being hired. You can determine if your orthopaedic surgeon is board certified by visiting [American Board of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#) for medical doctor (MD) trained physicians and [American Osteopathic Board of Orthopaedic Surgery](#) for physicians trained through a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) program.

## **Fellowship Trained Joint Replacement Surgeon**

Once a surgeon completes his or her orthopaedic surgery training, they can begin practicing in the community. The majority of surgeons now choose to spend an additional year in training focusing on a specific area of orthopaedics (such as joint replacement). This allows the surgeon to gain a better understanding and skill set in that area of orthopaedics. This can be useful information for evaluating who you want as your surgeon.

To learn more about what it means to be a fellowship trained surgeon, please see [What it Means to be a Member of AAHKS](#).

## **Physician and Hospital Websites**

Most surgeons are searchable with information available about them online. It can be helpful to look at the information posted about the surgeon through their practice website. The quality and amount of information will vary widely based on that surgeon's practice. Some surgeons will have little to no information about them, while some will have a wealth of information. It can be helpful to look for a list of procedures performed by that surgeon and if your condition is something they treat. Other valuable information includes how long the surgeon has been in practice, where they did their training, awards and honors they have received and insurance carriers they accept. Short video biographies are sometimes present that may allow you some better insight to the doctor's practice philosophy. If you find a surgeon that looks like a good fit for you, you may be able to schedule appointments through the website too.

## **Physician Rating Websites**

The same type of online services that let you pick out a good local restaurant (like Yelp) or find a plumber (like Angie's list) are available for finding physicians. Physician rating websites provide a place for current patients of a physician to provide ratings of their experience for the benefit of people who are looking for a physician. There are a wide variety and a large number of these websites available to the consumer which can make the process confusing and overwhelming.

It is important to understand that not all physician rating websites are created equal, and the quality and control of information can vary dramatically. Some websites ask only a few

questions and use star rating systems but don't allow for comments while other sites ask a lot of questions and allow comments.

There is no regulation of these websites currently and the process of reviews can be easily manipulated or falsified. There many known examples of people who are not actual patients of the physician posing as patients (e.g. friends and family, disgruntled employees, someone seeking to damage the physician's reputation, etc.) to give glowing or horrible reviews. There is currently no way for these websites to verify the patient was treated by the physician being reviewed despite some sites advertising claims to the contrary. Many of the websites will have inaccurate or outdated information regarding physicians, and not all physicians in your area may be listed.

### **How Physicians Manage Their Online Reputations**

Physicians use ratings websites in a variety of ways. Physicians who take an active role in monitoring these sites and request reviews from patients will typically have much more information available for you to review; however, this is a measure of a physician's interest in promoting his or her practice and isn't necessarily a direct reflection of that person's bedside manner, knowledge or skill level. Some of these websites also encourage physicians to pay for enhanced services, such as having their names come up when you search for another physician in their area or by putting their good reviews up in a more prominent location than bad reviews. Many physicians choose to not respond directly to poor reviews or engage with these websites for a variety of reasons to include the potential for a violation of a patient's privacy rights (HIPAA), medicolegal concerns or worsening the situation of a disgruntled patient.

Physician rating websites can be helpful in looking for a joint replacement surgeon but should not typically be used as your only tool. These websites can give a general perspective of a physician's practice but also have many shortcomings for making a fully informed decision.

#### **See also:**

["Using Physician Rating Websites,"](#) Center for Advancing Health

["Physician Rating Websites,"](#) American Medical Association Journal of Ethics

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