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## **Patients Experience Faster Recovery, Fewer Complications with New Approach to Hip Replacement Surgery**

*by Christopher Blackman, MD*

Patients who need hip replacement surgery now have a less invasive alternative to traditional surgery: direct anterior approach hip replacement. This new technique reduces post-operative pain, shortens recovery time, lessens the chance for dislocation and reduces time away from work and other activities for most patients.

Patients who previously had traditional surgery on one hip and then had anterior surgery on the other hip tell me the [difference between the two is like night and day.](#)

### **What is direct anterior approach surgery?**

Instead of operating on the hip from the back or the side as is done in traditional surgery, we perform this surgery by going through the front of the patient's hip. This approach enables us to insert the hip replacement without cutting through muscles or tendons, as is necessary in traditional hip replacement surgery.

We also use special fluoroscopic imaging equipment, which allows us to fit the new joint precisely. As we perform the procedure, we can see live, 360-degree views of the patient's hip joint on a screen. This enables us to do measurements that ensure the replacement fits exactly and that both legs measure the same length afterward.

### **Why haven't I heard about this before?**

This advanced surgery method has only become available in Greensboro in the last couple years. Direct anterior hip replacement surgery must be performed on a special operating room table, which Cone Health has purchased for use by surgeons at Wesley Long Community Hospital.

To perform this surgery, orthopedic surgeons must complete special courses in this technique. I became the first surgeon locally to perform this surgery on a regular basis after receiving advanced training in Chicago through the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. I scrubbed in and performed surgeries alongside experts all across the country before performing my first direct anterior approach hip replacement surgery in Greensboro in February 2011.

## What are the advantages for patients?

There are many advantages for patients.

- **Less pain**  
Muscles and tendons do not have to be cut to insert the joint replacement from the anterior position. Therefore, patients' pain level after surgery is much less than with traditional hip replacement surgery.
- **Smaller incision**  
The incision is just 3 to 4 inches long compared to 8 to 10 inches for traditional hip replacement surgery. This also reduces pain for the patient because it decreases the amount of trauma the body experiences.
- **Reduced chance of dislocation**  
The technique we use – which includes live fluoroscopic imaging measurements – ensures a precise fit for the replacement. This greatly reduces the chances of dislocation, which is a significant risk after traditional surgery. I have now performed more than 100 direct anterior approach hip replacement surgeries – and have not had a single dislocation.
- **Fewer post-surgery restrictions**  
Patients can return to activities much sooner with anterior surgery because they don't have the restrictions that are common after traditional surgery. They can do weight-bearing activities right away. They can walk upstairs. They can get in and out of the car. They can bend their hip any way that it is comfortable. There are no restrictions against crossing the legs or other movements, as there are after traditional hip replacement surgery.
- **Faster recovery and return to work**  
The hospital stay after anterior surgery is usually 2 or 3 days. Patients are back to work and normal activities in 4 to 8 weeks following direct anterior approach hip replacement surgery. That compares to 3 months or longer for traditional hip replacement surgery.
- **Greater return to normalcy**  
Patients typically have no long-term restrictions on activities after anterior hip replacement surgery. For example, I have a patient who rides horses as part of her job. Another surgeon had told her that she would not be able to ride horses again after traditional surgery due to the possibility of hip dislocation as she swung her leg over the horse. She instead had anterior surgery, and I have given her no restrictions. She can continue to ride horses. Most patients are able to return to all normal activities after direct anterior approach hip replacement surgery.

## Who is a candidate for the surgery?

Anyone who needs a hip replacement is a candidate for direct anterior approach hip replacement surgery. I use this technique on all of my [hip replacement patients](#).

**How can I get more information?**

If you would like to schedule a consultation, please call our office at 336-275-0927.