

# Average hip, knee replacement patient may be getting younger

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Brent Ruch, a collegiate basketball center, opted to have his left knee replaced at age 35 after struggling with pain for years.

"Walking with a limp and living with a consistent aching [pain](#) was physically and emotionally difficult. I didn't want to live like that," said Ruch, who lives in a suburb of Chicago.

When his doctor told him he'd be playing golf in less than six weeks after the procedure, "I knew [knee](#) replacement was my best option," Ruch said.

Ruch is one of many young and middle-aged adults who are opting for knee and hip replacements earlier in life, experts say.

People might think of the typical joint replacement patient as a senior aged 65 or older, but the [surgery](#) is becoming much more common among younger adults with chronic joint pain.

"Hip and knee replacements are no longer for grandmas and grandpas," said Dr. Richard Berger, the Rush University Medical Center [orthopedic surgeon](#) who treated Ruch.

"Twenty years ago, we used to tell [younger patients](#) to come back in 10 years. Today, the average age of my patients is 57," Berger said in a news release. "This age group is typically less apprehensive about getting surgeries because they don't want to hobble around or live their life taking anti-inflammatories or pain pills."

About 28% of hip replacement procedures are performed on men and women younger than 55, according to research presented at the American Academy of Orthopedics' annual meeting in 2023.

And by 2030, people younger than 65 are expected to account for 52% of hip replacements and as many as 62% of total knee replacements, researchers have projected.

Many younger adults getting joint replacements are former athletes. Mary Lou Retton, a 1984 Olympic gymnast, had her hip replaced at age 37, and downhill skiing gold medalist Lindsay Vaughn got a knee replacement at 39.

Volleyball star Gabrielle Reece and her husband, big wave surfer Laird Hamilton, both had joint replacement surgeries on the same day in April 2016. She got a new knee, he a new hip.

"That we went through it together in some weird way made it easier," Reece told [U.S. Today](#) at the time.

Improvements in joint replacements have made the surgery an outpatient procedure for many younger adults, experts say. There's less need to cut muscles, ligaments or tendons, allowing for a faster and more effective recovery.

Another reason people are opting for early replacement surgeries is that the new joints are better built and longer lasting, Berger said.

Only 1% of people younger than age 55 who had a hip replacement have needed surgery to fix the new artificial joint, according to a 2023 study by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons.

In particular, the plastic that replaces cartilage in an artificial joint has become more durable through technological advances, experts said.

A Chicago-area marathon runner, Pete Sturm, had to stop running after intense groin pain that he figured was a pulled muscle. It turned out that at age 35 he had degenerative arthritis and needed a [knee replacement](#).

Both Sturm and Ruch returned to exercise within two months of their surgeries. Sturm is back to running and intends to do a half-marathon in

the future.

"Arthritis keeps you from being active and can destroy every aspect of your life," Berger said. "No one should have to live with joint pain, especially when there are minimally invasive joint replacement procedures that will bring you joy again."

**More information:** The National Institutes of Health has more about [knee replacement surgery](#).

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