

Joint damage: what can we do in the 21st Century?

Simon Palmer is a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon specialising in sports injuries and joint replacement of the lower limb. One of his interests is the treatment of joint cartilage damage.

“Joints of the body are lined with a highly specialised material called articular cartilage. This is the smooth and shiny substance that one sometimes sees on the end of a chicken bone at Sunday lunch!

Unfortunately damage to the cartilage in the joints of the lower limb is particularly common from sports injury or accidents. Cartilage has poor abilities to repair itself. Thus, once injured persistent pain and loss of function is common. With continued use the joint can progress to arthritis”

“The problem is that artificial joints implanted into younger people often do not provide an adequate level of function and seem to fail early”

Mr Palmer believes that effective early treatment of cartilage damage will improve joint function and may prevent early arthritis, hopefully removing the need for joint replacement in young patients.

“In recent years autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI) has been used increasingly for the treatment of cartilage damage. In this procedure a small sample of cartilage is removed from the joint and cartilage cells called "chondrocytes" are grown in a laboratory. These are implanted into the cartilage defect at a second small operation and retained by a specially developed collagen membrane. This procedure has the potential to generate new cartilage . In some studies of 11 years 80% of patients have been satisfied. Importantly the new tissue seems to resemble normal cartilage when viewed under the microscope”

So far Mr Palmer has been impressed with the good results in his own patients.

“We offer this technique to suitable private patients and can offer such procedures to our NHS patients if they are happy to be part of a clinic trial called the ACTIVE trial (<http://www.active-trial.org.uk/>)”

“ Unfortunately not everyone is suitable for these techniques because of wear-and-tear of the joint. We are pleased to offer minimally invasive hip and knee replacements and ankle replacements for these groups.”

Mr Palmer treats his NHS patients at Southlands Hospital, West Sussex
(see <http://www.worthinghospital.nhs.uk/>)

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For more information please see Mr Palmers website www.orthopaedic-surgeon.org.uk or (phone 01903 783980).