



November Cover Story: Fit and over 50

Sports has become a gray area

A new generation of fit-and-over-50 people are flooding gyms and athletic fields - and keeping doctors busy in the process.

"I see many people in their 50s and 60s who play tennis, like to run or hike, and they want to keep doing these things," said Ammar Anbari, MD, an orthopedic surgeon on the Backus Medical Staff and team physician for the Connecticut Sun and Norwich Free Academy. "We are seeing more of the types of injuries you might see in younger people in older patients. Also, people with limited arthritis want to stay active, so they may consider partial joint replacement."

The number of people 55 and older who are health club members is about 8.5 million, up by about 1.5 million compared to 20 years ago, according to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association.

And with that physical activity comes a greater need for sports medicine and surgeries to keep them going.

According to the latest National Center for Health Statistics, the national total knee replacement rate increased by 58% from 2000 through 2006. In 2006, 542,000 total knee replacements and 231,000 total hip replacements were performed in the United States.

People have more options with improved materials and less invasive procedures.



"We now have prostheses with surfaces that are more accommodating to stress and wear. Materials such as ceramics, metal on metal and more durable plastics are more durable," Dr. Anbari said. This allows people to continue their activities, such as skiing or sports, even after a knee or hip replacement.

Selective replacement also offers more options for some patients. "We don't replace the whole joint anymore if it doesn't need it," Dr. Anbari said. "We can replace just a kneecap, or just the ball in a shoulder rather than the ball and socket. This also allows us to use smaller incisions, which means quicker recovery times and less pain." He said these types of replacements are not meant to last forever, and the patient may require joint replacement in 10 or 20 years.

Dr. Anbari said he has been seeing more patients in their 40s for cartilage restoration. If a focal area of cartilage is missing it can be replaced with cartilage from another site or with donor tissue. If a patient has diffuse arthritis, however, this isn't a procedure for them.

With newer arthroscopic procedures for knees shoulders and hips, surgeons are able to make repairs through smaller incisions, so there is less pain.