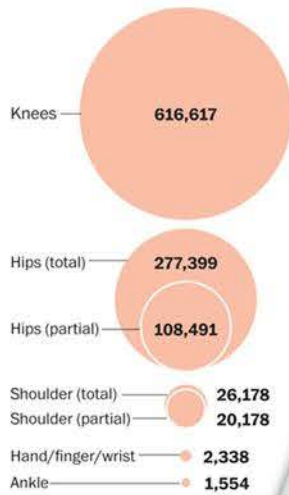


What's replaceable, and how long it lasts

Surgeons performed more than a million hip and knee replacements in the United States in 2008. Because they are becoming increasingly popular with people in their 40s and 50s, many patients will need to repair or replace their replacements 10 to 20 years later. The science of less common joint prosthetics is still evolving, so estimating the life span of a replacement elbow, wrist or ankle is difficult, and outcomes vary greatly.

How common are joint replacements? U.S. totals in 2008

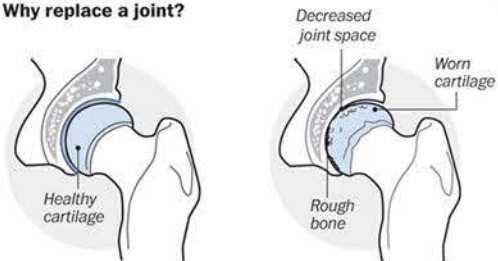


What are they made of?

Replacement joints are typically made of metal (stainless steel, titanium, chrome or cobalt alloys) and ceramic or plastic.

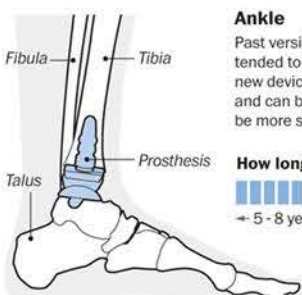


Why replace a joint?



In healthy joints, smooth, rubbery cartilage covers the ends of bones, and a capsule surrounds the joint with lubricating fluid, letting the bones glide easily against each other.

When the cartilage is damaged, usually by arthritis, bones rub against each other, eroding the ends and making the joint stiff and painful. When the pain and immobility become intolerable, replacement is often the answer.

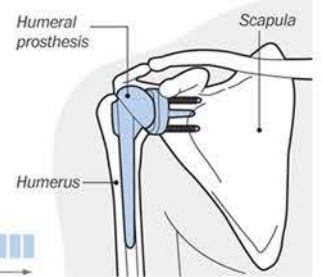


Ankle
Past versions of prosthetic ankles have tended to loosen and fail prematurely, but new devices that require less bone removal and can be aligned more precisely seem to be more sturdy and reliable.

How long might it last?
→ 5 - 8 years →

Shoulder

Those most likely to require a replacement have osteo- or rheumatoid arthritis or a severe, complicated fracture. A surgeon may replace only the damaged ball if the socket is healthy.

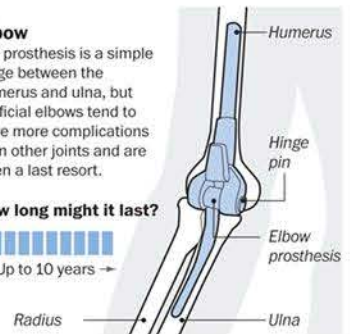


How long should it last?

→ 12 - 20 years →

Elbow

The prosthesis is a simple hinge between the humerus and ulna, but artificial elbows tend to have more complications than other joints and are often a last resort.

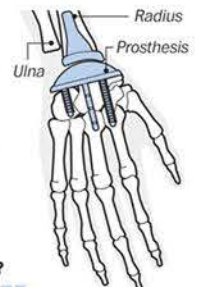


How long might it last?

→ Up to 10 years →

Wrist

Wrist replacements are rare. The joint is so complex that this surgery is considered only after all other options fail. The best candidates need pain relief but don't put heavy demands on their wrists. Finger joints are occasionally replaced as well.

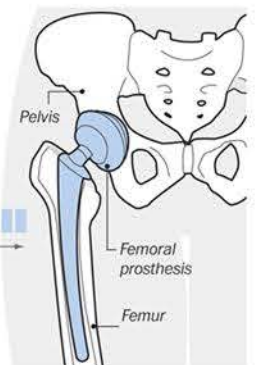


How long might it last?

→ 10 - 15 years →

Hip

The most common age for hip replacement is 60 and older. Younger people tend to put more wear and tear on the prosthesis and require a second procedure later on.

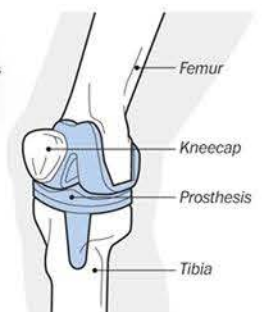


How long should it last?

→ 15 - 20 years →

Knee

The most commonly replaced joint also has the highest success rate. Improved surgical techniques have shortened typical recovery time to weeks rather than months.



How long should it last?

→ 10 - 15 years →