

White Paper

7 Common and Costly Mistakes People Make When Selecting an Orthopedic Surgeon

Skeletal muscular problems are common and can be present at birth or occur due to injuries. When you are suffering from a skeletal muscular problem such as pain on the spinal cord, fractured knee, repetitive motion injury to a tendon, or pain on the joint bones or nerves, you need to see an orthopedic doctor for diagnosis. If the problem is severe, you may be referred to an orthopedic surgeon.

Sometimes, your primary healthcare provider may recommend an orthopedic surgeon for you. This is usually the case if the procedure you will undergo is covered under your health insurance policy. However, not all surgeons you will be directed to will be right for you. If you decide to look for an orthopedic surgeon by yourself, you need to research well to find the right professional. Getting the right surgeon will greatly help in your recovery process.

So, how do you find the right orthopedic surgeon?

Finding the right surgeon is a matter of knowing what you want and the common mistakes to avoid. Below, we have outlined seven common mistakes that people make when selecting an orthopedic surgeon. Make sure you don't make these mistakes:

1. Not Meeting With the Surgeon One-on-One

Some people simply ask for referrals or search for surgeons on the internet and agree to have a procedure done. While getting referrals is important, you want to work with a surgeon that you will be comfortable with and that you completely trust. There is no better way to find out whether a surgeon will be good for you than by meeting him or her one-on-one and asking all the questions you have.

After you have found or have been referred to a potential surgeon, schedule an appointment with him or her. The appointment is important to discuss your orthopedic problem and find out what the surgeon thinks of the situation. But more than this, the session should help you determine whether the surgeon will be right for you.

Before the appointment, you should know the history of your orthopedic injury or condition. For example, you should have an idea how long you have been feeling pain, the extent of the pain, signs and symptoms of the condition and so on. It may be helpful to carry along your pain or condition assessment results to your appointment.

During the appointment, find out how the surgeon relates to you. In particular, check the following:

- Is the surgeon helpful and ready to answer your questions?
- Does the surgeon have a list of alternative treatment programs for the injury?
- Does the surgeon suggest preventive care or does he or she recommend surgery?
- Do you strike a chord with the surgeon? Does he or she seem like someone you can trust?

Do not be afraid to ask the surgeon any questions you may have. Remember, choosing the surgeon can be the beginning of a long term professional doctor-patient relationship. You therefore want to get everything right the first time.

Now that you have met the surgeon, it is time to check his or her education and training. It is also time to ask more questions about his or her experience and issues related to treatment.

2. Not Checking Medical Education

Before you hire an orthopedic surgeon, you should check his or her medical education. After college, orthopedic surgeons attend medical school for 4 years to receive a DO or MD degree. After medical school, the surgeon must complete a residency in orthopedics, which usually takes a minimum of 5 years. For surgeons, that would likely be to sub-specialize in other areas; for example, with hand surgery, additional study, tests and certification are required.

Check the Certifications

Find out if the surgeon has surgical privileges at the hospital where the surgery will be performed. Also, find out whether the surgeon is certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgeons (ABOS). To be certified by the Board, surgeons must pass a test 2 years after starting to practice. Moreover, they must take an additional test every 7 to 10 years to prove they have been attending continuous medical education (CME).

If you are looking for an orthopedic surgeon specialized in hand surgery, find out if he or she has been awarded the Certificate of Added Qualification in Surgery of the Hand. However, if you have a sports-related injury, look for a surgeon who is sub-specialized in sports injury. The surgeon should also have a Certificate of Added Qualification.

Finally, you want to check whether the surgeon has other general relevant certifications such as the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) and the Orthopedic Technologists (OTC) administered by the National Board for Certification of Orthopedic Technologists (NBCOT).

An orthopedic surgeon with the required medical education and industry certifications will be a good choice.

3. Not Checking the Surgeon's Specialty and Training

The orthopedics field is wide and covers everything related to skeletal muscles. Some of the services that an orthopedic surgeon can offer include arthritis and joint replacement, and services related to the foot, ankle, hand, upper limb, shoulder and elbow. Other common orthopedic services include spinal injury treatment, sports medicine service, physical medicine and rehabilitation, pediatric orthopedic service, musculoskeletal tumor service and bone trauma service.

Given how wide the orthopedic field is, it is easy to assume that any orthopedic surgeon will be right for you. However, nothing can be further from the truth. Orthopedic physicians can be sub-specialized in different areas such as orthopedic trauma, surgical sports medicine, musculoskeletal oncology, spine surgery, foot and ankle surgery, pediatric orthopedics, total joint reconstruction (arthroplasty), shoulders and elbow surgery, and hand surgery, among others.

A surgeon who is specialized in the injury or condition you are suffering from will be a better choice. The surgeon is likely to have been involved in similar cases in the past and his or her in-depth knowledge on the subject can be crucial to getting the correct treatment program. A specialized surgeon will know the best practices in the subspecialty, modern treatments, side effects of various treatments and modern and experimental orthotic equipment in the market.

Apart from the general qualification provided by the ABOS (American Board of Orthopedic Surgeons), make sure the surgeon you choose has a Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) in the sub-specialty that is relevant to your injury. Check that the CAQ is valid for that year. Most sub-specialties require the surgeons to be recertified after every 10 years.

4. Not Checking Experience of the Surgeon

Before you choose an orthopedic surgeon, consider his or her experience. Regardless of your condition, you want to work with an experienced surgeon who can accurately and confidently diagnose your ailment and come up with a treatment plan that will work for your unique situation. An experienced surgeon will put you at ease and answer all your questions about the condition and suggested treatments.

Conditions related to the skeletal and nerve system can be complicated to diagnose. Most of the time, the conditions are characterized by a pain in the muscles or bones. Unfortunately, most people do not seek medical help early enough when they start experiencing some pain. It is only when the pain becomes severe or a physical injury becomes worse that they opt to see an orthopedic professional. If your condition is not diagnosed quickly, it can deteriorate, making it necessary for alternative expensive treatments or even surgery. The earlier you get the correct diagnosis, the better.

Ideally, you want to work with a surgeon who is active and performs a number of surgeries related to your condition in a year. Any surgeon who performs at least one surgery a month will be good to put on your list of potential candidates. The surgeon

you choose should also have been successful with the surgeries he or she performs. Find out the success rate and, if possible, the names of some of recent patients the surgeon has treated. While some surgeons elect to keep the information of their patients confidential, they are likely to give you a few names of patients who were happy with their service. If available, ask to see “before and after” photos of some of the patients treated by the surgeon.

5. Not Asking for Treatment Options

There is no single treatment or orthopedic procedure that will work for all patients. Surgery is not the only option for treating an orthopedic condition. In fact, surgery is usually resorted to only when all other treatments have failed to relieve your condition’s symptoms or are known to fail to work at that stage of the condition that you are suffering from. Be wary of surgeons who offer surgery as the first option. Such surgeons may simply be after economic benefits rather than keeping your emotional, physical and health needs first.

The type of treatment that will be recommended will depend on the condition you have, type of injury, and your age, among other things. Examples of treatment options that may be recommended include:

- **Braces and Support** - Braces and supports are recommended to patients with injured joints or weak muscles. There are many types of braces available on the market. The surgeon will recommend the right braces or support for your condition. Examples of braces and support aids include shoe inserts, walking crutches, ice and heat wraps, elbow clasps, and knee braces, among others.
- **Casts** - Casts are used for post-surgical immobilization and treatment of many types of fractures.
- **Rehabilitation and Therapy** - Depending on your condition, rehabilitation can be used as the primary treatment or as an adjunct to another treatment such as surgery. Examples of rehabilitation methods include physical therapy and post-surgical rehab.
- **Medication** - Some of the common medications used to treat orthopedic conditions include Celebrex, Naprosyn, Aleve, and Motrin. All these are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications.
- **Injections** - Injections are used to treat some instances of orthopedic conditions. One common injection given to treat orthopedic injuries is cortisone. The medicine comes with few side effects.
- **Surgery** - In most cases, surgery is used as a secondary treatment option. Most surgeons will only recommend surgery when other treatments have failed to relieve your symptoms.
- **Arthroscopic surgery** - This treatment mainly uses small incisions and a camera inserted into a joint to carry out surgical procedures. Arthroscopy has become the standard treatment for many common joint problems.

6. Not Checking the Medical Team

Your orthopedic condition may be treated by a single doctor or a team of medical specialists and health providers. Several doctors from different specialties may work together during your treatment. This multi-professional approach is important in managing the symptoms of various orthopedic conditions.

Find out if the orthopedic surgeon you are looking to work with is running a one-person operation or has a team to help him or her. If your condition is not severe, you may not require a surgeon with a team. However, for severe conditions that require more than rehabilitation programs, the surgeons must have a team. Some medical professionals who may be involved in your treatment include:

i) Primary care sports medicine physician. This professional has extra fellowship training in musculoskeletal injuries and other problems that affect athletes. The physician can manage many orthopedic problems and recognize those that require surgery.

ii) Rheumatologist. A rheumatologist is specialized in treatment of arthritis and other rheumatic diseases that may affect the skin, bones, muscles, joints and other tissues.

iii) Physical Therapist. The professional evaluates and provides treatment for injuries or conditions related to the cardiopulmonary, musculoskeletal and neuromuscular systems of the body.

iv) Occupational Therapist. The professional helps people with emotional, developmental or physical disabilities to lead independent, satisfying and productive lives. The occupational therapist often oversees the care of patients with a debilitating condition.

v) Psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a doctor who is qualified in helping patients who have lost their abilities to restore them. The professional provides integrated multidisciplinary care aimed at helping the patient recover his social, vocational, medical, psychological and physical abilities.

vi) Podiatrist. Podiatrists are specialized in providing foot care. The professional can also prescribe medicine and perform surgery.

vii) Nurses. Nurse practitioners who are specialized in providing care to orthopedic patients and may help the surgeon in providing care. Nurses help patients understand their conditions and treatment plans, and will also answer many of their questions.

7. Not Finding Out About Follow-Up Care

Orthopedic treatments can take weeks to months for their effectiveness to be determined. Small injuries can be treated within days while severe injuries may require regular follow-ups and check-ups before they are healed. Find out whether the surgeon

provides follow-up care, as it is especially important if you have a severe orthopedic injury or condition that requires surgery.

During the follow-up, the surgeon will assess your condition and may recommend additional treatments, aids or medicines to ease pain or help in the healing process. Depending on your injury, you may have to visit the surgeon or one of the team members involved in your treatment may have to visit you at home.

The first post-operative office visit will come two to three weeks after you have been discharged. From there, the frequency of visits will depend on how your healing is progressing. Most surgeons will see you at intervals of six weeks. As your orthopedic condition improves, the frequency of follow-ups will reduce to once every few months, then yearly checks.

During follow-up, the doctor will check your wounds to ensure they are healing as expected. At the same time, he or she will want to know whether you understand how to take care of yourself and use any of the equipment prescribed. For example, the surgeon may want to know your ability to:

- Use assistive walking aids such as a walker and crutches
- Adhere to a home exercise program
- Transfer yourself from beds to sofa or chair
- Use the continuous passive motion (CPM) machine, if prescribed

You should make a list of questions to ask your doctor or his team during the initial follow-up visit.

Get the Right Orthopedic Surgeon

Many people make the mistake of hiring an orthopedic surgeon without finding out more about their education, experience and treatment programs. Choosing the wrong surgeon can result in being diagnosed incorrectly or put on an expensive treatment program that could have been avoided.

When looking for a surgeon, know what you want and the alternatives you have. It is advisable to talk to a healthcare professional who knows more about orthopedic cases so that you will not be entirely in the dark when the surgeon is explaining some of the treatment options. You can also research the Internet for more about the particular orthopedic condition you have. The more knowledgeable you are about your condition, the easier it will be for you to determine whether a surgeon you are evaluating will be right for you.

The above are seven of the most common mistakes most people make when looking for orthopedic surgeons. Asking the right questions will help you find the right orthopedic surgeon.

BLOGS

1. Target Keyword: What to look for in an Orthopedic Surgeon
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Deciding to go for a knee or hip replacement is a major step towards reclaiming an active lifestyle. Therefore, you need to feel confident that you have found the right orthopedic surgeon to treat you. Most patients wait for their primary care providers to refer them to specific surgeons. However, the surgeons are not always a good fit for the patients.

If you opt to choose an orthopedic surgeon by yourself, there are a number of things you should consider, including:

Ask for Referrals

If your healthcare provider has not recommended any particular surgeon, ask for a referral. Some healthcare providers have agreements with specific orthopedic surgeons to treat their patients at subsidized rates. The surgeon you choose is likely to impact your out-of-pocket costs. Other people who can refer you to good orthopedic surgeons include your current clinicians, friends and acquaintances. Preferably, you want recommendations from people who are familiar with the surgeon, his or her practices, experience and reputation.

Evaluate the Surgeon's Credentials

Check the surgeon's educational degree, medical degrees, training and credentials. Moreover, find out the associations that the surgeon belongs to and which boards he or she is certified by. The three largest certification boards are the [American Medical Association](#), the [American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons](#) and the [American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons](#).

Also, check the experience of the surgeon. Find out how many procedures he or she performs annually. Ideally, you want a surgeon who performs 12 or more procedures annually.

Consider Specialty and Training

Look for a surgeon specialized and trained in the procedure you are interested in, be it knee or hip replacement. Moreover, you may be interested to know if the surgeon has expanded his or her knowledge through continuing education. Ideally, you want to choose a surgeon who is abreast with new devices, cutting-edge surgical approaches and new technologies.

If you are looking for a specific procedure or device, find out if the surgeon is trained in that area. For some newer devices, the surgeon will usually have received training from the manufacturer on how to implant them.

Meet with the Surgeon

After compiling a list of potential surgeons, request a free consultation with each one of them to see which one will be a good fit for you. Meet the surgeons one-on-one to discuss your situation and find out what they think. Before meeting with a surgeon, have a list of questions to ask. You should also understand your pain level and knee or hip history. This will help the surgeon give you more accurate information on what he or she thinks.

Ask the surgeon about his or her experience with cases similar to yours and the success rate. Also, find out if a surgical plan is prepared before the procedure and what is included in it.

You have to research well to get the right surgeon. The above are some of the things you should consider when choosing an orthopedic surgeon.

2. Target Keyword: Types of medical issues an Orthopedic Surgeon can help with
Page Title: Types of medical issues an Orthopedic Surgeon can help with

An orthopedic surgeon can treat conditions, injuries and diseases related to the body's skeleton and muscles. The doctor is also specialized in treating conditions related to the nerves, tendons, ligaments and joints.

Depending on your condition, the orthopedic surgeon may work alone or with a team of other doctors specialized in different areas. Most orthopedic conditions are characterized by chronic symptoms that change in severity over time. As a result, a

multidisciplinary team approach is usually recommended for some severe orthopedic conditions.

Some of the medical issues that an orthopedic surgeon can help with include:

Knee Injuries

The surgeon can help treat knee pain and problems. Every day, the knee is involved in strenuous activities such as kneeling and lifting. Moreover, the knee is vulnerable from high-impact activities such as aerobics and jogging. The surgeon can treat various knee injuries such as tendonitis, torn cartilage, strained or sprained knee muscles and arthritis.

If the knee is severely damaged by injury or disease, then an artificial replacement may be necessary. The surgeon will first consider other alternative treatments such as bracing, injections, anti-inflammatory medications and assistive walking devices before suggesting knee replacement.

Spine Conditions and Injuries

The orthopedic surgeon can also help patients with *kyphosis* (a curvature of the spine). Kyphosis may be present at birth or can result due to various factors such as metabolic problems, "brittle bone disease," neuromuscular conditions and others. When the condition is diagnosed, it can be treated in a number of ways including bracing and surgery.

Orthopedic surgeons also help patients with back pain by conducting a surgery operation known as laminectomy. The surgery involves removing a part or all of the vertebral bone to reduce the compression of the nerve roots or spinal cord and hence reduce the pain. A laminectomy is only considered after other back pain treatment options have been proven to be ineffective.

Bone Injuries

Another common problem that orthopedic physicians treat is bone injury. Some bone injuries may be treated through physical therapy while others, which are severe, may require surgery. One of the most common bone surgeries done is hip joint replacement. The surgery is done to replace a worn out or damaged hip with an artificial joint (prosthesis). Patients who suffer from severe pain due to arthritis or those who have had a hip fracture may require surgery.

An orthopedic surgeon can also diagnosis and treat hand problems. With today's technology, the surgeon can work on the hand with the aim of improving its functioning as well as appearance. For appearance, the surgeon will work together with a plastic surgeon. Common hand conditions treated by orthopedics include rheumatoid arthritis and congenital hand deformities.

Orthopedic surgeons can diagnose and treat any medical condition associated with the functioning of the skeletal bones. Moreover, some surgeons have sub-specialized in particular procedures and treatments. When searching for a surgeon, find out whether the professional you want to work with is specialized in treating the particular condition you are suffering from.

3. Target Keyword: An Orthopedic Surgeon vs. other options

Page Title: An Orthopedic Surgeon vs. other options: why seeing an OS is always best

When you have an injury, condition or disorder related to the skeletal system and its associated ligaments, joints and muscles, it is important to visit an orthopedic surgeon for a diagnosis. Getting the right diagnosis on time is important in determining the right treatment option to go for.

While there are a number of alternative treatments for orthopedic conditions, you should not risk your health by opting for treatments that can worsen your condition. Instead, you should make an appointment with a reputable orthopedic surgeon for a proper diagnosis. Below are some reasons why you should choose an orthopedic surgeon over other options:

Correct Diagnosis of Multiple Conditions/Injuries

An orthopedic surgeon can correctly diagnose a wide range of disorders and injuries, including:

- i) Knee injuries- LCL (Lateral Collateral Ligament), MCL (Medial Collateral Ligament), PCL (Posterior Cruciate Ligament), ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) and Meniscus injuries
- ii) Foot and ankle problems
- iii) Arthritis (rheumatoid and osteoarthritis arthritis)
- iv) Pelvic and/or hip pain
- v) Whiplash

vi) Tendonitis

vii) Shoulder problems including shoulder separation and frozen shoulder

viii) Post-operative joint replacement

ix) Lower back problems including radiculopathy, arthritis or degenerative disc or joint diseases, discogenic back pain or lumbar disc pain, and herniated disc

Comprehensive Treatment and Resources

Orthopedic surgeons are specialized with the physics of how the body moves. After diagnosing your source of pain or injury, the surgeon will administer a treatment program tailored to your needs. The program may consist of a single or combination of treatments including:

i) Education on self-management and care strategies such as use of cold or heat to manage pain

ii) Use of commercial or custom-designed appliances to correct and prevent deformities that may hinder your ease of movement. Orthotics assist in alignment and support, and can help to improve the functioning of the specific part of the body affected

iii) Taping/bracing to hold a part or support the body stable and motionless to prevent further pain and injury

iv) Techniques to improve muscle sequencing and neuromuscular control

v) Therapeutic exercises to increase muscle endurance and strength or address specific muscle dysfunctions

Proper Education on Available Treatment Options

The orthopedic surgeon will also educate you on the different treatments available and their likely impact on your health. In some cases, the surgeon may recommend new treatment methods that he or she may be trained for or new equipment that can work for your injury.

An experienced surgeon is likely to have worked with cases like yours in the past and will know the likely outcome of any treatment option. This experience is crucial when creating a treatment program or suggesting a specific treatment option. Knowing the likely outcome of a procedure can give you peace of mind.

While there are many options you can go for to address your orthopedic injuries, choosing a professional orthopedic surgeon is always the best option. A good surgeon

will educate you on the procedure he or she recommends and tailor the right treatment to your unique situation.

4. Target Keyword: How to be a good patient for an Orthopedic Surgeon

Page Title: How to be a good patient for an Orthopedic Surgeon

To have a successful orthopedic surgery, there has to be good communication between you and the surgeon. You need to have developed a good “partnership” with the surgeon, be educated about the nature of your condition and the different treatments that can be administered. A good partnership will enable you to be actively involved in the decision-making process and know what to expect from the physician during and after the surgery.

It is important to “help” the surgeon help you. Being helpful to the surgeon can be crucial to being diagnosed correctly and given the right treatment. Below are some ways in which you can be a good patient for your orthopedic surgeon:

Be a Good Observer

You can be a good patient by telling the surgeon what you observe with your condition. Observing and noting down all the changes that happen as your condition evolves will be beneficial when seeking treatment. Some small things like noting when your pain began, the extent of pain you feel and so on can help the physician catch any developing problems before they escalate to fatal levels.

Speak the Truth

One of the qualities that surgeons love in patients is speaking the truth. You should give the right information when the surgeon asks you. Sometimes patients give untruthful information for fear of how they will be perceived by the surgeon. Remember, the surgeon is there to help you and will keep confidential any information you divulge.

Providing untruthful information can trouble the prognosis of the condition, in many cases, which can lead to more suffering for you.

Trust the Physician

You have to trust that the physician will diagnose and treat you correctly. Your orthopedic surgeon is qualified and has years of experience in performing different operations. When there is trust between you and the surgeon, the treatment procedure is more likely to be successful. As a patient, you should trust that the information the physician is giving you is what is best for your health and not what is best for his or her bottom line.

Trust makes a physician easily approachable and able to communicate properly with you. A trusted physician will also be empathetic, kind and patient with you both before and after your orthopedic surgery.

Follow the Surgeon's Instructions

Your surgeon will love if you can follow the instructions he or she gives. Unfortunately, many patients do not fully follow the instructions they are given by their physicians. Some of the repercussions of not following the surgeon's advice may include new infections, delayed healing process, expensive alternative treatments and so on. By failing to follow your physician's instructions, you will be putting your health at risk. For example, apart from not getting healed, you can become frustrated and develop other complications such as depression.

It is important to be open and honest about your condition with your orthopedic surgeon. Any information that you provide will be crucial to understanding your condition and determining the best treatment option.