

Two Hip Surgeries in One Year Bring Back Fremont Man's Quality of Life

Steve Ong, an engineer from Fremont, played a lot of racquetball. For over 30 years, Ong was on the racquetball court seven days a week. But six years ago he started to feel a pain in his groin area. He thought he had pulled a muscle, but it never seemed to really heal. At first he cut back his racquetball to five days a week. Then, he played three days a week. And last year, he stopped playing altogether.

Ong was cautious about how to proceed, and sought a second and third opinion from doctors about what was the best course of action. Ong was told that the damage to his hip was caused by arthritis and was not going to heal. He was told he could wait before having surgery, but his condition and the pain would only get worse.

Ong made an appointment at Washington Hospital's Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, and met with one of the co-directors, veteran orthopedic surgeon, John T. Dearborn, MD. "Dr. Dearborn was very sincere and passionate about restoring my mobility, and he described things very clearly," says Ong. "He told me that the younger I was when I had surgery, the shorter my healing time would be." Dr. Dearborn also told Ong that as he adjusted his body to avoid the pain on his right side, he could be harming his hip on the other side.

"If you look up hip replacements online, it looks very scary. Also, one doctor I spoke to told me that the surgery would only last about 10 to 15 years. I kept thinking that if I put it off, I wouldn't have to do it a second time. However, Dr. Dearborn informed me that the new materials he uses are designed to last much longer."

Dr. Dearborn explains, "What used to wear out with hip replacements was the bearings. The plastic liner that is inside the socket where the ball and socket come together would wear out in about 15 to 20 years. Since 1999, we have had special plastic bearings that are treated with an electron beam to make the material 100 times more wear-resistant than the old material. This special, ultra-strong



Steve Ong and Dr. John Dearborn are ready for surgery!

plastic was designed specifically for hip replacements and can last 30 plus years."

According to ProPublica's Vital Signs website, Dr. Dearborn has the lowest adjusted rate of complications among hip surgeons in Northern California and is one of the top seven hip replacement surgeons statewide. Dr. Dearborn joined the medical staff of Washington Hospital in 1997 after completing his fellowship training in joint replacement surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. In 2001, Dr. Dearborn developed a less invasive hip replacement technique that promotes faster recovery, and to date has conducted over 6,000 hip replacement procedures.

In March 2019, Ong decided to have hip replacement surgery on his right hip. "The day after the surgery, I joked with

Dr. Dearborn that I wanted my money back because everything went too quickly and smoothly," says Ong. "I didn't feel any pain! Even when I got home, the pain was zero to one. I didn't need to take any prescription pain medication." Within four to five weeks he was able to ride on a stationary bicycle.

Ong continued to increase his activity. After three months, he resumed his beloved racquetball. But the problem, he said, was that his left hip, the one that had not been replaced, was starting to give him some trouble. Flexible about his exercise routine, Ong more and more chose swimming over racquetball, which was less stressful on his left hip. However, as the year wore on, the pain grew. In October of this year, Ong underwent a second hip replacement surgery, this time on his left hip.

"The first surgery was so successful. It really made me happy. I was ready the second time," Ong says. After each of his hip surgeries, Ong had three visits from physical therapists at his home. The physical therapists helped him figure out the safest ways to navigate stairs, bathrooms, and other challenges. They assigned him simple stretches and exercises to help with his healing and recovery.

Reflecting on the pain he experienced in his hips before he underwent the two surgeries, Ong notes, "When you hurt, you do not want to do many things. You just want to sit on the couch. Your quality of life really drops."

Bringing back quality of life for his patients is what Dr. Dearborn loves best about his work. "Hip and knee replacement surgeries are among the top two surgical procedures that improve a patient's quality of life," says Dr. Dearborn.

Joint replacement is not only for people who are extremely fit or athletic. Dr. Dearborn explains, "Hip replacement patients are diverse, with a wide range of activity levels and body types. My youngest hip replacement patient was 19 years old and my oldest patients are active people in their 90s. A candidate for hip replacement is someone whose hip joint is painful and who has reduced mobility due to damage from arthritis, osteonecrosis, or a fracture."

"The degree of a person's physical limitations is the determining factor in whether or not we recommend joint replacement." Dr. Dearborn adds, "We want to return any patient to his or her pre-arthritis state."

For Ong, the goal is returning to racquetball. "Right now, my right hip feels 100 percent recovered, and my left hip is getting there." He adds, "The experience with the joint replacement team and Dr. Dearborn was great."

For more information about minimally invasive hip and knee replacement surgeries at Washington Hospital's Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, visit www.whhs.com/IJRR.

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