

# Living Pain Free — What a Concept!

*Innovative hip replacement surgery  
improves mobility and quality of life*

Shankar Vemulapalli knows a thing or two about living with pain. Born in India with cerebral palsy, the San Jose resident learned to deal with being differently abled at a young age. Despite limited mobility on his left side, his parents raised him the same as any normal kid. He didn't know any other way. That ability to deal with difficulty stayed with him through nine surgeries during his childhood, then into adulthood, where he continued to be as active as he could. It wasn't until he was in his 50s that his weaker left leg began to slow him down.

"Cerebral palsy affects everyone differently," Vemulapalli explained. "My left leg doesn't bend at the knee like it should. Because of that, the leg tends to drag and puts a lot of stress on my right hip. For the past few years, it's gotten worse, but I managed to deal with it. Finally, in early fall 2024, it was so painful that I had to go to the Emergency Department. X-rays showed my hip was dislocating and I was referred to an orthopedic surgeon."

Thinking he would just be prescribed medication, Vemulapalli met with the surgeon. When the surgeon said Vemulapalli needed hip replacement surgery, he was shocked. But when the surgeon said the surgery would be too difficult and he wouldn't do the procedure, Vemulapalli didn't know what to think.

"The surgeon felt it wouldn't be successful and would leave me in worse condition," Vemulapalli shared. "That was when I decided to get a second opinion and went to see Erik McDonald,

MD. That visit was totally different. Dr. McDonald said while it wouldn't be an easy surgery -- it would be very complicated -- he said he could do it and it would relieve my pain.

"He was also very clear that the surgery wouldn't cure my CP, but I already knew that," Vemulapalli continued. "Reducing or eliminating the pain and regaining mobility was most important. Dr. McDonald assured me he could achieve those goals."

Vemulapalli and his family had long planned to go to India for a family wedding. That meant putting off any possible surgery until he returned, giving him time to think through the information Dr. McDonald provided. It also allowed him to seek other options in India.

"I thought it was important to get as many other opinions as possible," he said. "But the Indian doctors told me the surgery wouldn't be easy and may require up to three months without walking. That was all bad news for me and I was more confused when we came home than when we left."

When he returned to San Jose in October, good news was waiting for him. While he was away, Dr. McDonald had been considering his case and the unique challenges Vemulapalli presented. He had a solution.

"I was very surprised to hear Dr. McDonald on the line," Vemulapalli recalled. "He said he had been thinking about my case and wanted to talk about how he'd approach the surgery. I could tell he really cared about me as a person and I felt ready to get my hip fixed."



San Jose resident, Shankar Vemulapalli enjoys activities previously unobtainable to him.

## Moving Forward

Vemulapalli met with Dr. McDonald in January 2025 to discuss the fine points of the procedure and schedule a time that worked for both of them. Dr. McDonald explained the procedure and assured Vemulapalli that he would be there to help every step of the way. On February 26, Vemulapalli went in for what he hoped would be life-changing surgery. He was not disappointed.

"I'm not exaggerating when I say Dr. McDonald gave me life, in a way," Vemulapalli said. "I was always a very active guy, in a sense. I could never really trek or hike like other people, but I always got around and I was very active mentally. Living with unending pain takes that away and Dr. McDonald gave me that active mind and lifestyle back."

Vemulapalli spent the next eight weeks in physical therapy rehabbing his right leg and working to strengthen his weaker left leg. He knows his left knee will never function like his right leg, but the new right hip gives him much more support and stability. He is thrilled with his newfound mobility and more than grateful to Dr. McDonald.

"It was serendipity that I found Dr. McDonald," Vemulapalli said. "We partnered to achieve this result. He did the hard work putting me back

together and that lack of pain allowed me to get back to functioning the way I wanted to. He even called me after I got home from the surgery -- on a Friday night -- to make sure the discharge went well and that I was doing OK at home. He told me to call him, even on the weekend, if I needed anything. This is a doctor that cares about his patients, and you can feel it."

In June, four months after his surgery, Vemulapalli and his wife spent his birthday touring Napa, something he says would not have been possible before.

"It's amazing to look back, and compare it to where I am now," he said. "I feel like my clock was set back, like I'm in my 40s again. I still do exercises the physical therapist taught me to maintain strength and mobility, but the pain is totally gone. Now, I can concentrate on enjoying my life. I still have things to contribute and now I can."

"I could have avoided surgery, stayed home and done nothing," admitted Vemulapalli. "But that's not how I look at my life. I wanted to have more good days with my wife and family. Now I can, without pain and with more mobility."

*For more information on Washington Health's Joint Replacement Program, or Dr. McDonald, visit [washingtonhealth.com/IJRR](http://washingtonhealth.com/IJRR).*

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—Shankar Vemulapalli