



ORTHOPAEDIC  
& SPINE CENTER  
Open MRI Center

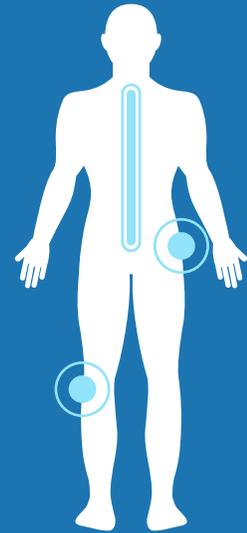


SURGERY  
ISN'T ALWAYS  
THE ANSWER

The pain of knee, hip, or spine problems likely won't keep you awake at night as much as concerns about your treatment will. Surgery seems scary, but is it worth it to take proactive steps to solve the problem early? Will insurance cover it? Are conservative treatments more effective?

This guide will better equip you to understand your conservative treatment options and make decisions with your doctor. We will discuss the benefits of conservative treatments (and why they may be required even if you have surgery), as well as the recovery and post-op conservative treatments you will need if you do opt for surgery.

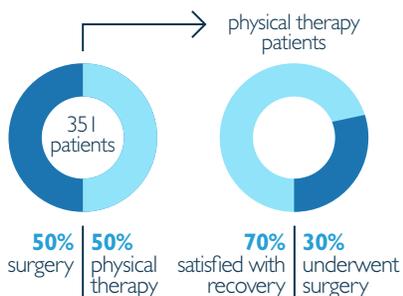
With today's medical advances, you don't need to fear surgery, but it's best to know your other options. In many cases, it's very likely that you may not need surgery at all. Read on to learn more.



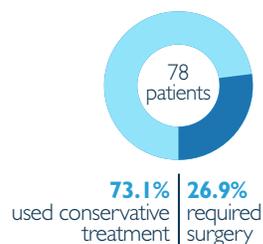
## Conservative Treatments May Be Just As Effective

During the past few years, many scientific journals and medical research centers have published reports about physical therapy and other conservative treatment options. The studies vary by body part and injury, but they all find the same thing—surgery isn't always necessary. Here are a few examples:

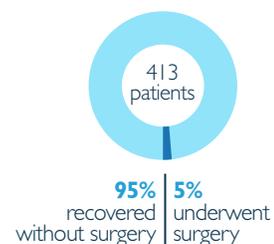
The [New England Journal of Medicine](#) evaluated 351 patients age 45 and older with meniscal tears and mild-to-moderate osteoarthritis in the knee. Half of the patients had surgery while the other half opted for standardized physical therapy. After six months, only 30% of the patients in the physical therapy group had undergone surgery. The remaining 70% were satisfied with their treatment and recovery.



A study conducted by the [National Center for Biotechnology Information](#) followed 78 patients who suffered from mild cervical spondylotic myelopathy (MCSM), a common condition associated to aging that causes impaired function and compression in the spinal cord. After three years, only 21 patients (26.9%) saw their condition deteriorate enough to require surgery. The remaining 73.1% used conservative treatment throughout for spinal recovery.



For the younger population, benefits of conservative treatment seem to be even greater. A study presented at the [American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine](#) in 2014 used conservative treatment on 413 patients with hip and pelvis fractures. Ninety-five percent of patients recovered with non-surgical conservative treatment, and the mean time to return to sports was 2.8 months.



These studies show that surgery isn't always necessary, and conservative treatment can be just as effective for both recovery success percentage and recovery time. The three following conservative treatments are likely non-surgical scenarios for many sufferers of hip, knee, and spine problems:

## Conservative Treatments for Hip Pain



Age-related deterioration, overuse, or trauma are just a few of the reasons that hip pain occurs. Luckily, there are a variety of conservative treatment options to explore for pain relief.

Treatment options work by either providing immediate relief from pain or preventing further damage to the hip-joint when the joint is involved. Medication and physical therapy are the most common first-line treatments for managing hip pain.



Clinically conservative approaches to hip pain involve the use of oral medication.



The use of corticosteroid injections into the hip and surrounding areas can reduce pain and swelling.

Corticosteroids work by suppressing the inflammatory response in the body, which allows the body to restore oxygen-rich blood flow to the hips and encourages repair. These injections involve **fewer side effects** than oral dosing, and injections provide fast relief from pain.



While pain management is critical for treating hip pain, prevention of further damage is important for healing hip joints. Hip pain might deter you from exercising, but exercise and

physical therapy can work to improve flexibility and strength through the hips. Physical therapy works to treat hip pain by correcting imbalances and areas of weakness in the body. This therapy often is supplemented with specialized hip and back braces and other orthotics, all designed to help manage pain and encourage healing.



Imbalances can occur as a result of a sedentary lifestyle, weight gain, or "guarding"—which refers to protecting the injured part of the body to avoid pain. Trained Physical Therapists will offer stretching and massage exercises to strengthen, increase flexibility and range of motion, while weight-lifting will increase strength and make the hips more resilient to overuse.

## Conservative Treatments for Knee Pain



According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, **knee injuries are on the rise** among child and adolescent athletes. Participation in competitive sports puts the knees of children and young adults at greater risk for injury. Knee pain can affect patients of all ages, making conservative approaches to handling knee pain an attractive alternative to surgery. The use of RICE therapy, active rest and physical therapy are optimal ways to manage knee pain.

RICE therapy uses rest, ice, compression, and elevation, and it can provide relief from many types of knee pain. Resting

means avoiding any activity that causes further pain to the knee.



Applying an ice pack to the knee for fifteen minutes every hour will decrease swelling of the joint and

provide relief from minor pain. Compression involves wrapping the knee with an elastic bandage or compression stocking. This acts to minimize movement and prevent swelling. Finally, elevation lifts the injured knee above the heart to decrease blood flow and excess swelling in the joint.

Active rest and Physical Therapy are additional ways to find relief from knee pain. Active rest is gentle exercise that allows for increased blood circulation without over-stressing the joint.



Walking, swimming, and yoga limit stress on the knees, yet maintain movement that can help with healing.



Physical Therapy for knee pain strengthens the surrounding muscles to prevent imbalances. **Strengthening the gluteal muscles** (buttocks), hamstrings, quadriceps, and core muscles will keep your posture and joints aligned to avoid further injury and pain.



There are a number of injections that also can assist in rehabilitating knee pain and injuries.

Sodium hyaluronate treatments such as **Euflexxa, Supartz, and Hyalgan** often are used to relieve acute knee pain associated to the onset of osteoarthritis and for general knee pain relief. Administered in a series of injections, these viscosupplements assist in helping the joint move more freely and with less pain. These injections are particularly effective when used in conjunction with regular physical rehabilitation, active rest, and RICE therapy.

## Conservative Treatments for Spine Pain



The good news about back pain is that conservative treatment resolves most cases instead of surgery. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), **80% of the population** seeks health care for back pain. However, dealing with back pain is difficult, and no one wants to waste time pursuing a treatment option that doesn't offer relief.

Treatment options for back pain range from basic pain management with medications to massage to electrical stimulation by a physical therapist. There are many ways to strengthen back muscles to keep the spine properly aligned and supported.



Pain management medications for spine injuries work in a couple different ways. Doctors use direct painkillers, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (like ibuprofen) or prescription drugs that combine a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory with an opiate for stronger pain relief.



Nerve blocks are injections of medication directly to the nerves around the spine to block the pain signal. Steroid-based medications act on the

inflammatory response of the body to reduce swelling and allow the damaged tissues to heal.



In addition to pain medications, Physical Therapy works to stabilize the spine. Muscles surrounding the spine can tighten or spasm, pulling the spine out of alignment and causing pain. Physical therapists will first calm tightened muscles with massage therapy or electrical stimulation. Heat or cryotherapy also work to deal with inflammation. Once the physical therapist relaxes the muscles, he or she can work on exercises to build strength and increase flexibility. These techniques work to create less pulling on the spine and decrease pain.

## Insurance Companies Require You to Consider All Options

More and more insurance companies are mandating that patients seek conservative options before electing for surgery; in fact, this is rapidly becoming a standard requirement for most insurance plans. Subsequently, even if you opt for surgery, you may have to complete conservative treatment methods before your insurance company will authorize and cover it.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, for example, now require six months of

conservative treatment before undergoing specific surgeries.

First, the insurance company wants to make sure that you have exhausted all of your treatment options before it pays for you to have an operation. This is why it may require a period of conservative treatment, even if now is the best time for you to have an operation. Second, your insurance company wants to make sure you are being treated for the right

condition. Proving this may require you to seek out a second opinion. After all of this, the surgery may still be considered "elective" and be subjected to different coverage.

In short, the sooner you talk to your doctor about the pain (and the sooner you contact your health insurance agency after an injury) the sooner you can start on the path to recovery—be it surgical or otherwise.

# Benefits of Early Surgical Treatment

In the aforementioned studies, patients had the option to switch from conservative treatment to surgery if they felt the latter was a better option, or if the doctor saw the conservative treatment wasn't working. While ligament tears and bone fractures may indeed heal with the help of physical therapy or crutches, there are times when the surgical benefits outweigh the risks.

Technological advancements in the past few decades have made the surgical process easier for patients to endure. **Minimally invasive** spinal surgery has been found to lower infection rates along with surgical time, blood loss, and pain. In the coming years, we could see more doctors recommending such surgeries as it becomes easier to work on a patient with minimally invasive methods.

Now, severe osteoarthritis in the hip and knee is a great example of when doctors might recommend surgery early on. As life expectancy increases, seniors wear out surgical implants and need revisions after 15 to 20 years. If a doctor sees bone loss, wearing of joint surfaces, and joint loosening on an X-ray, he or she could recommend **total replacement** surgery. In this case, the longer the old implant remains in the body, the more damage could occur; and surgery is a more appealing option over conservative treatments.

## Every Patient is Different

If you think you are a candidate for surgery, starting the process of conservative treatment first will help move the process along—in some cases, it could even cure your pain entirely. Talk to your orthopedic specialist and get an evaluation for your situation and a recommended course of treatment. Understanding what your doctor wants and what your insurance company requires are the first steps toward a full recovery.

Although it may seem inconceivable when you're suffering from a painful condition, it is possible to return to your life as it was prior to your health problems. No matter if the pain and discomfort came as the result of an injury, a degenerative condition or a medical deformity, there clearly is a range of treatment options available. Once you've carefully considered the alternatives, you may find that conservative treatment is, indeed, the right answer for you.



## About Orthopaedic & Spine Center

Orthopaedic & Spine Center, located in Newport News, Virginia, is a full-service state-of-the-art orthopedic practice with 24 patient exam rooms, three x-ray suites, a Lunar DPX Bone Densitometer Room, an Open Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Center and physical therapy services. OSC physicians have full staff privileges at Riverside Regional Medical Center and Mary Immaculate Hospital, and active clinical staff privileges at Peninsula Surgery Center.

Between 8% and 12% of OSC-ORTH patients have surgery, while the rest are treated with conservative approaches. To learn more, visit [www.osc-ortho.com](http://www.osc-ortho.com).



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