



MELISSA MEIRINK STRETCHES BEFORE A RUN IN WASHINGTON PARK IN DENVER.

NEW TREATMENT OPTION FOR RUNNERS WITH HIP INJURIES

A revolutionary new technique can cure runners of hip pain

A local doctor created the surgery, a labral reconstruction, that uses donated tissue to rebuild the hip

Melissa Meirink of Castle Pines loves running. The 38-year-old mother of two has competed in numerous area races, including several half marathons and marathons; she qualified for the Boston Marathon twice. But two years ago, the thought of ever running again seemed impossible. Over time, the long miles had taken their toll and Melissa developed severe pain in her hip. She let it fester for months, until she really couldn't

take the pain anymore.

"Especially when I was running downhill," she said. "I tried physical therapy and other stuff. I feel like I tried everything under the sun, acupuncture, rolfing, and more."

Eventually she had an MRI done and a doctor diagnosed her with a stress fracture. After spending eight weeks on crutches, the stress fracture healed, but she still had a lot of pain in her left hip. The pain became debilitat-

ing. It progressed to the point that Melissa couldn't walk, lie-down or play with her kids without terrible pain. She eventually sought out a second opinion.

Dr. Brian White of Western Orthopedics is the director for hip preservation at Porter Adventist Hospital. White told her that the cartilage in her hip was clearly damaged. He felt that surgery was the only solution.

"The thought of surgery scared

me,” Melissa admitted. “I decided not to have surgery for awhile. I tried to deal with the pain. I tried a steroid shot. But my hip was really painful.”

While she was afraid, she was also miserable, so she finally decided to get the surgery. After the surgery, Melissa went through months of rigorous physical therapy and is now active again. While she says it was a slow process with a few setbacks, she is essentially pain free in her left hip.

More and more people have reported hip pain to their doctors over the last 10 years and the most common cause is a tear or damage to the labrum, the protective cartilage around the hip socket. Previously, surgeons would repair or cut out the damaged tissue with varying rates of success. But Dr. White has developed a revolutionary technique of rebuilding the labrum with donated tissue.

“The hip joint is pretty simple,” White said. “It’s just a ball and socket. When the two fit, you have a well built machine that can usually work well. When the two are not built well or, especially in runners who drive the machine hard, things wear out and break down.”

Research published in the February 2018 edition of “Arthroscopy: The Journal of Arthroscopic and Related Surgery” says that labral reconstruction, the technique pioneered

by White, is a superior treatment for torn labrums. The labrum, a ringlike structure around the hip socket, can tear as a result of athletic injury or age, and most surgeons simply repair the chronically torn structure. White makes a new one, or reconstructs it. A huge benefit is that the new tissue doesn’t link to existing nerve endings, leaving the recipient virtually pain free so they can resume their favorite activities.

“The new labrum simply cannot feel pain in the same way the old labrum did,” White said. “The new hip feels better and functions better than the old hip did. This is the future of the hip.”

White’s study compared results from 29 patients, age 14 to 51, who underwent arthroscopy on both hips. On one side the labrum was repaired, on the other it was reconstructed. The study allowed doctors to compare results on two hips within the same patient, the only variable was the treatment for the labrum. After a period of two years, none of the reconstructed labrums failed, whereas nine of the repaired labrums, or 31 percent, did. Remarkably, each patient whose labral repair side failed chose to have another surgery to replace the repaired labrum with a reconstructed one. In short, they wanted to enjoy the same mobility without pain as they felt in their reconstructed hips.

White has now performed more

than 2,000 labral reconstruction surgeries. “This study is a turning point,” he said. “We no longer repair any tissue in the body that is chronically torn, except in the hip. This research shows we can replace hip tissue just like we can in other joints. It’s a massive change.”

Melissa is happy that she decided to have the surgery and is thankful that she met Dr. White.

“Dr. White was really amazing. I have basically a new hip. He shaved the cuff and the ball. He fashioned a new labrum from tissue from a donor. That has been really good. It lessened the pain. It really gave me a new lease on life. It gave me time to play with my kids and even get outside to play soccer with them.”

Melissa wants other runners trying to endure pain in their hip to know that this surgery could be an option for them too. She never thought she’d be running again, but now that’s her reality.

“I have run a few races post op and my goal is still to run marathons again and to re-qualify for Boston.”

Melissa wasn’t just grateful to Dr. White, but also to the person who donated the tissue that was used to make her new hip. She wrote a thank you note to that person’s family explaining how thankful she feels for getting her quality of life back.

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