



What is femoroacetabular impingement?

Femoroacetabular impingement (FAI) is a condition that affects the hip joint. The hip joint is where the thigh bone (femur) attaches to the body. FAI occurs when the ball (head of the femur) and/or socket (acetabulum) of the hip joint becomes misshapen, rubbing and tearing the bone and cartilage in the joint. It can occur in one or both hips.

Who is most likely to develop FAI?

No one knows if FAI is already present at birth or if it develops later. FAI seems to be most common in very active people, high level athletes, and people who do heavy labor.

How serious is FAI?

For some people, FAI does not cause problems. For others, it may cause pain severe enough to interfere with daily activities. Over time, FAI may lead to arthritis because of the bones and cartilage rubbing together.

What are the symptoms of FAI?

Most people with FAI have moderate-to-severe hip pain as well as decreased motion in the hip joint. They might also have pain in the low back, pelvis, and/or groin.

How is FAI diagnosed?

Most patients can be diagnosed by their doctor with a physical exam and by answering questions about their pain. X-rays are used to determine the shape of the ball and socket. MRI and/or CT scan may also be used.

What are nonsurgical treatment options for FAI?

- Avoiding activities that make symptoms worse
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen and naproxen
- Physical therapy for hip strengthening (but not stretching)

Who might be a candidate for surgery?

Surgery may be considered as a last resort for people:

- whose bones are fully grown (which usually occurs by mid- to late-teens)
- who have pain so severe that it interferes with daily activities
- when nonsurgical treatments have not worked
- who have mild or no arthritis in the hip joint

What are the surgical options?

Total hip replacement

In this surgery the ball and socket parts of the hip joint are removed and replaced by implanted devices. Total hip replacement has been used for many years and is proven to be very effective in decreasing pain and restoring hip function, especially in older people. The average hip replacement lasts about 25 years. For younger people who tend to be more active, the implants could eventually wear out and require replacement.

FAI Surgery

FAI surgery does not require implants. In this very new surgery, instead of being replaced, the ball and socket are reshaped and any torn cartilage is removed or repaired. FAI surgery can be done through an incision in the skin over the hip joint or through a tube with cutting tools (arthroscope). It is not yet known which of these approaches has the best results because long-term studies have not been completed.

How effective is FAI surgery compared with total hip replacement?

Both of these surgeries have advantages and disadvantages:

- Total hip replacement has been proven to provide long-term relief of symptoms. Additionally, because the bones of the ball and the socket are replaced with implants, arthritis cannot come back after total hip replacement.
- Initial studies of FAI surgery have shown relief of symptoms in many people for two to three years following surgery. However, because no long-term studies have been completed, it is not known how long symptom relief will last, or if FAI surgery will help prevent arthritis or the need for a total hip replacement.

How does recovery time compare for total hip replacement and FAI?

The recovery time for both of these hip surgeries varies from a few months to over a year. Healing after FAI surgery is usually shorter than recovery from total hip replacement.

Are the activity restrictions different for total hip replacement and FAI surgery?

Total hip replacement - After total hip replacement, studies have shown that activities that stress the hip joint, such as jumping, carrying heavy loads, or contact sports like football, should be avoided as much as possible.

FAI surgery - FAI surgery may allow people to return to normal activity levels without the restrictions necessary with total hip replacement. FAI surgery may also prevent or delay the need for total hip replacement, although this has not yet been proven in long-term studies.

What are the risks with FAI surgery?

Some of the risks with FAI surgery are the same as for total hip replacement: infection, bleeding, nerve injury, blood clots in the veins of the legs, and instability in the hip joint.

Some additional risks for FAI include:

- irreversible damage to the ball of the joint if the blood supply to the bone is injured during surgery
- fractures if too much bone is removed
- abnormal bone growth in the tissues outside the bone (heterotopic ossification)
- scarring in the hip joint

How should I decide between total hip replacement and FAI surgery?

There are a number of things to consider when making a decision about surgery, such as your age and general health, activity restrictions following surgery, and potential complications. Talk to your doctor about these factors. Also ask about the long-term safety, effectiveness and risks for both of these procedures.

Do surgeons need special training to perform FAI surgery?

Yes, especially if FAI surgery is being done through an arthroscope. Experts agree that this procedure should be performed only by an orthopedic surgeon with special training and experience in FAI surgery. The surgeon also should be able to perform other hip surgeries, such as cartilage repair, in case other damage is found during surgery that was not identified prior to surgery.

Is FAI surgery covered by Regence?

Yes, when criteria are met. You can find the criteria and more information in the Regence Medical Policy at: <http://blue.regence.com/trgmedpol/surgery/sur160.html> .

THE BOTTOM LINE

For patients with severe, long-term pain caused by FAI, surgery may be an option. Total hip replacement has been used for many years and is proven to be effective in treating hip pain. The evidence for FAI surgery is less certain. Short-term results are promising; however, the long-term results and risks are not yet known.

Note: Regence physicians, nurses and pharmacists developed this summary to provide you with information about potential advantages and lack of advantages of FAI surgery. This summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from scientific studies and input from practicing doctors and specialists.