

medicine

*Hobbled baby boomers
inspired by Bo's comeback*

New Hips for Younger Patients

Bo Jackson's amazing return to professional baseball this season after receiving a cementless artificial hip in 1992 has sparked a torrent of inquiries about the treatment. But orthopedic surgeons are divided about the virtues of the cementless procedure.

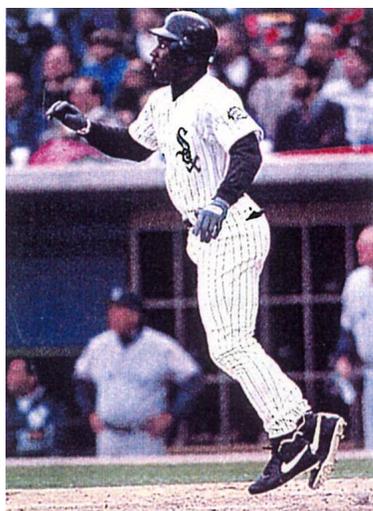
Each year about 120,000 Americans with arthritic or broken hips undergo total-hip replacement surgery, in which the hip joint is replaced with an artificial ball and socket. They choose the procedure to relieve the constant pain and stiffness of arthritis, because the hip joint has deteriorated (Jackson's problem) or because the hip has healed improperly after a break.

With patients over age 50, surgeons generally implant the artificial hip's components into bone using cement. But these "cemented" artificial hips generally wear out after 15 or 20 years. Younger patients are in a quandary: Should they put off getting an artificial hip until they're older, or should they go ahead now and risk having to get a second one years later?

Bo's new joint, known as a "cementless" implant, may help solve the dilemma. Introduced in the late 1970s and improved over the years, the cementless hip can withstand more physical activity, at least in the short term. Some orthopedists also believe it will prove more durable in the long run than the cemented variety, making hip replacement a more attractive option for younger patients.

With cementless implants, a portion of the artificial shaft and socket is sometimes coated with a chemical found in bone. This chemical stimulates the bone to grow around the implants, forming a bond much stronger than cement. Other times, as in Jackson's case, the implant is merely given a roughened surface to enhance bonding.

"Cementless bonding may require a few weeks longer than bonding with cement," says **Dr. Jacob Rozbruch**, chief of orthopedic surgery at Beth Israel Medical Center North in New York City. "But

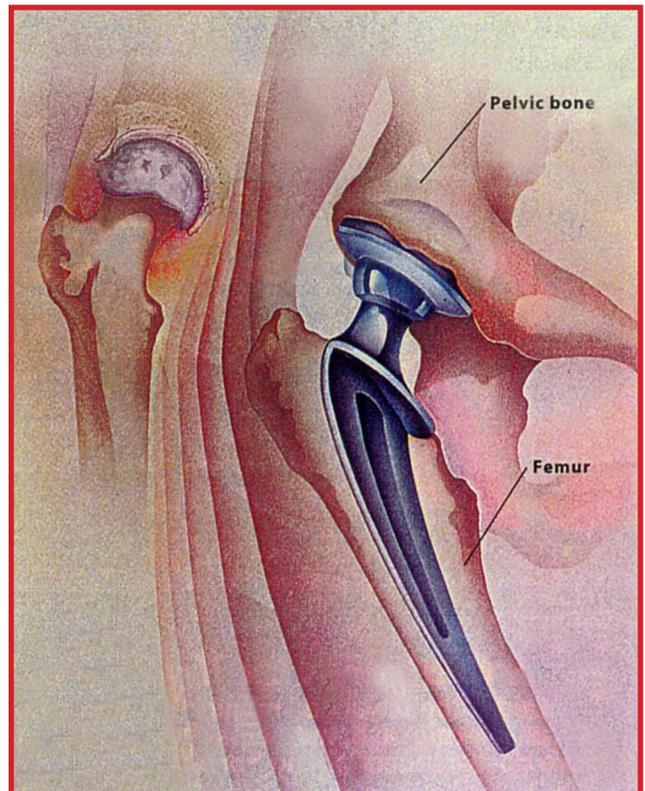


Bionic Bo hits a home run.

once it's secure, the cementless implant should remain stable for good."

Dr. Omar Crothers, an orthopedic surgeon in Portland, Me., disagrees. "There's absolutely no data to suggest a cementless hip will last any longer than a well-done cemented hip," he says.

Rozbruch and Crothers do agree that the publicity over Jackson's return to baseball has prompted dozens of younger patients to ask them about the cementless procedure, which can especially benefit arthritic



An artificial hip (right) can replace a diseased joint (left). Whether cemented or cementless, an artificial hip has two basic parts: A metal shaft with a ball on its upper end is wedged into the femur (thigh bone), and a cup-shaped metal socket with a plastic lining is fitted into the pelvic bone. The socket houses the metal ball, which swivels within it when the leg moves.

but sports-minded baby boomers. One of **Rozbruch's** patients, Clyde Worthen of Cliffside Park, N.J., a judo instructor and former national judo champion, was forced to retire from competition at age 38 after developing arthritis in his left hip. For the next 10 years he lived with constant pain and walked with a severe limp, until an exercise partner who'd had both hips replaced suggested that Worthen undergo the procedure too. Worthen had the operation last August and is now pain-free, walking without a limp for the first time in years. "When Bo hit that home run in his first time at bat this year, I felt great," he says. "I knew if he could come all the way back, so could I."

Patients with cementless hips generally can swim and play golf and doubles tennis. But those resuming strenuous activity, as Jackson and Worthen have done, risk wearing out the hip socket's slippery plastic coating, cautions Dr. Charles Engh, medical director of the Anderson Orthopedic Research Institute in Arlington, Va., who has implanted 3,500 cementless hips since 1977. Then, says Engh, the plastic coating (but not the entire implant) will need to be replaced, a procedure he predicts Jackson may need in about five years - or 200 home runs.

-Mark Fuerst

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