

Why I Got Knee Replacement Surgery and How it Helped Me Get My Life Back

By Laura Zuiderveen



In 2005, my knee pain started to put my life on pause. I am a classically trained opera singer and motorcycle enthusiast. For more than 30 years I've performed with groups such as the Washington National Opera Chorus®. We often have rehearsals for three hours, during which we stand for most of the time. Before my surgery, I would come home from rehearsal in so much pain.

In 2011, I saw my orthopedic surgeon and he said that I had very little cartilage left in both of my knees. He suggested getting cortisone shots every three months to help ease the pain. At the time, it was unclear how long the cortisone shots would last and when my knees would give out.

I was trying several different medications along with the cortisone shots in an effort to relieve the pain. However, it continued to get worse. I started to count stairs in many of the situations I found myself in. How many stairs would it take me to get up to my office from the first floor? How far was it from the grocery parking lot to walk into the store? How many steps could get me onto the stage? It started to become a daily struggle, but I kept delaying the surgery because I really wanted to perform in Verdi's *La Forza Del Destino* with the chorus in the fall of 2013. However, once I got to the point of being unable to climb any stairs, I realized that I couldn't live like this anymore.

Surgery is not an easy decision but I wanted to stop living my life on pause. Here are the five reasons I decided to have surgery:

1. **Performing in the Opera.** Just walking to the dressing room or onto the stage became incredibly painful. At one point, I was just praying to get through the show rather than enjoying the night.
2. **Riding my Motorcycle.** I have a Harley-Davidson® trike I call "Fireball," named after the color of the Atomic Fireball® candy. Getting on and off the bike with my bad knees was challenging. Now I can ride a Harley!
3. **Walking up and down the stairs.** When you are in pain, you are thinking about it more often than not. I knew the exact number of steps to get from floor to floor in my office. My doctor's office kept hinting, "Whenever you are ready for surgery..."
4. **Enjoying walks in the park.** This is one of the greatest pleasures of my life. I would try to walk when my knees were in bad shape, but I would return home miserable.
5. **Taking shots of cortisone.** In the beginning, the shots worked well but they didn't give me as much relief over time.

With new knees, I've **Hit Play** on the things I enjoy the most!

If you are considering or planning for a replacement surgery, here are some tips from my experience:

1. **Have a caregiver ready.** In my opinion, you really do need a caregiver for the first few weeks post-surgery. I slept a lot the first week after the surgery. I especially needed help with food preparation and laundry. The washer and dryer were in the basement, I was unable to go up and down a steep flight of stairs for a month.
2. **Do physical therapy.** About a day or two after I returned home, a physical therapist came over to start working with me for two weeks. I did the exercises with my therapist, but also pushed myself to do it on my own time. Outpatient physical therapy continued for four more weeks.
3. **Ask if your hospital has classes.** My hospital had a “joint replacement” class. It was fantastic and helped to set my expectation of the surgery and recovery time. My orthopedic surgeon also provided a booklet about a month before surgery, which helped prepare me both physically and mentally. It introduced the idea of physical therapy, what to expect pre- and post-surgery, and what medications I would need during the healing process.

I **Hit Play** and kept moving forward with my life. Don't put your life on pause because of hip or knee pain. Visit TimetoHitPlay.com to learn more about how joint replacement may be an option for you, so you can **Hit Play** on your life again too.



Important Safety Information

The performance of knee and hip replacements depends on age, weight, activity level and other factors. There are potential risks and recovery takes time. People with conditions limiting rehabilitation should not have knee or hip replacement surgery. Only an orthopaedic surgeon can determine if knee or hip replacement is required based on an individual patient's condition.