

When golf pro Larry Utley could no longer bear the pain in his left knee, two orthopedic surgeons at Gottlieb performed a new minimally invasive procedure that quickly got Larry back to full swing.

“I was in a lot of pain. I had my knee cleaned out a couple times, but then arthritis set in and it was just bone on bone. I’m on my feet all day so I wasn’t going to put up with it,” said Utley, who lives in Grayslake.

Earlier this year, Utley was one of the first patients to undergo the new type of “unicompartmental knee replacement” surgery being done at Gottlieb, one of only a few hospitals in the Chicago area offering the procedure.

The operation calls for a small, two- to three-inch incision, and only the diseased portion of the knee is removed and replaced with a metal and polyethylene joint, while the healthy portion is untouched, said orthopedic surgeon Ryon Hennessy, MD.

Patients who undergo the simpler operation have a shorter hospital stay, minimal blood loss, quicker rehabilitation, a greater range-of-motion and a smaller scar than those who undergo traditional knee replacement surgery. The latter requires an eight- to 12-inch incision, and the total knee is replaced. Several months of rehabilitation are required and range of motion is restricted.

“Patients who have had the minimally invasive procedure are happier sooner than those who have the traditional knee replacement,” said orthopedic surgeon Jeffrey Meisles, MD, Dr. Hennessy’s partner, who also has been doing knee replacement surgery for many years.

Another Gottlieb orthopedic surgeon Paul T. Prinz, MD, pointed out that not everyone who needs a knee replacement is a candidate for this type of surgery. “It is generally indicated for people whose arthritis affects only one side – or condyle – of the knee.”

Dr. Hennessy estimated that about 20 to 25 percent of patients who suffer from osteoarthritis of the knee qualify for this new procedure.

“The other patients who have osteoarthritis of the knee have more than just one condyle affected so the traditional total knee replacement surgery is required,” Dr. Prinz said.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease that often follows a history of injury or overuse of a joint. It is one of the oldest and most common forms of arthritis, affecting more than 21 million people in the United States – a number which is expected to continue to rise with the aging population. The disease causes the cartilage normally found in joints to break down, which removes the buffer between bones, and the resulting bone-against-bone friction causes pain and eventual loss of movement.

Before the surgery, Utley said the pain in his left knee was making it difficult for him to enjoy his work. “But now my knee feels great. They did a marvelous job.” He said his

wife had a full knee replacement about three years ago and her range of motion is not as good as his. “She can't do stairs as well as I can.”

Utley is so pleased with the results of his surgery, he said if his right knee goes out he would go back to Dr. Hennessy. “I'm very grateful.”