

Successful Musculoskeletal Surgery Starts With Prehab for the Mind



Tracy Scheller, MD
Medical Director of the
Graf Center for Integrative
Medicine

In preparation for a total knee replacement, a patient at Englewood Health can first enroll in a program on mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), one of many options offered to reduce preoperative anxiety.

Anxiety can trigger a physiologic stress response that impedes healing. "Increased anxiety depresses your

immune system response," said Tracy Scheller, MD, the medical director of the Graf Center for Integrative Medicine at Englewood Health.

"Anxiety prior to surgery can also potentially increase the need for more anesthesia, and that can increase anesthetic risk," Dr. Scheller noted. "Reducing stress preoperatively can also help with postoperative pain. Increased pain postoperatively can affect overall recovery."

Mindfulness focuses on allowing people to be in the present moment without worry. "MBSR combines mindfulness and meditation body awareness," Dr. Scheller said. "It allows you to explore patterns of behavior, thinking, feeling and action, and it can create new brain pathways that can help reduce stress response. It's an eight-week program, usually two hours once a week."

Dr. Scheller works to reduce anxiety in

patients undergoing a variety of musculoskeletal surgeries, including total hip and knee replacements, scoliosis surgery, discectomy and spinal fusions. At Englewood Health, surgeons identify patients who have a heightened level of anxiety about a procedure and then refer them for integrative medicine. "We say to these patients, 'Let's have you work with an integrative medicine physician to talk about some coping techniques that you can work on preoperatively to allow you to have decreased anxiety and stress.' It can have a big impact."

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In addition to MBSR, coping techniques can include meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy, yoga, therapeutic massage, music therapy, hypnosis, manual lymphatic drainage and Reiki. Manual lymphatic drainage is a form of massage that can help with the healing process. "Reiki is a very calming form of energy treatment that makes people feel very relaxed," Dr. Scheller said.

Dr. Scheller explained that guided meditation is used to instill calming thoughts, such as "Everything is going to be all right and my pain will be controlled," as opposed to "Something bad can happen!"

Talking to the patient to understand their

sense of spirituality can also help. "Coping techniques can include anything that someone can connect to that gives them comfort. An integrative medicine consultation can be so helpful, because coping techniques can be individualized," Dr. Scheller said. "When we meet with someone individually, we understand what their stressors and anxieties are, and also what they connect to. Pain in itself creates much anxiety and stress. All of these coping techniques are used to reduce the stress response so that patients can heal. I tell people to try to find something that they

are going to connect with and then practice it leading up to their surgery."

The benefits of these coping techniques apply to more than just surgery. "It takes some time and some commitment to introduce people to these techniques, but if people do take that extra time, it can help in so many other aspects of their life—not just dealing with surgery, but with all of the other life stressors that we deal with all the time," Dr. Scheller said.

At Englewood Health, the integrative health program acts as prehabilitation for the mind, getting surgical patients ready for the next step. ●