

Bone Spurs and Degenerative Arthritis - Part of Growing Old

Bone spur, or osteophyte in medical term, is part of the aging process, which refer to a bony protrusion formed next to degenerated joints. It is commonly misunderstood that a bone spur can pick on the skin and flesh to cause pain. In fact, bone spur is one of the signs of degenerative arthritis, in which the cartilage protecting the underlying bone in a joint worn-out. This worn-out causes pain since the underlying bones are exposed, which consists of nerve ending. The cartilage worn-out also render the joint unstable, so new bones will be grown to re-stabilize the joint, i.e. bone spur.

Degenerative arthritis is commonly found in small fine joints, knee, neck and lumbar spine. This can be very painful and adversely affected human activities e.g. walking. Apart from age, sex and genetic predisposal, improper posture and repetitive stress can also hesitate the degeneration process. According to one of the studies conducted by the Department of Orthopaedics & Traumatology of HKU Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, Chinese people is more common to have bow legs and is therefore more prone to have degeneration at their knee joints, when compare to Western people.

Lifestyle modification should be part of treatment of degenerative arthritis, including adequate rest, physical exercises for strengthening the muscles, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. pain killer). If the above methods fail, an artificial knee joint is an effective method for pain relief. Computer Assisted total knee replacement is now commonly practiced in Queen Mary Hospital, with more than 80% of the patients taken this replacement by using a computer navigation system. Its advantage is the improved accuracy on the positioning of the implants, so the surgical error can be reduced and this artificial joint becomes more durable.