



## Don't be afraid to schedule joint surgery



**Dr. Eddie Huang**

Dr. Eddie Huang is an orthopedic surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Joint Center, and an assistant professor of Orthopedic Surgery at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth.

### Pandemic fear and elective procedures

Living amidst a pandemic is comparable to living in fear. The uncertainty we're faced with has forced us to rearrange our daily lives and rethink our priorities — in particular, health priorities. Many people have decided to cancel or delay routine medical appointments and/or elective surgeries. However, waiting too long to get the care needed, whether it is reactive or preventative, can lead to life-threatening situations.

Hospitals have made extraordinary strides to create even safer and more efficient environments for outpatient care. As an orthopedic surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Health System, I encourage those suffering joint pain to set

aside their fears and reconsider scheduling the elective appointment and/or surgery that they need.

### A patient success story

I want to tell you one of my favorite surgical stories of all time. It involves a recent patient of mine. Right before COVID-19 swept the nation, I met Timothy Broussard, a 61-year-old man suffering from severe arthritis in his left knee. Broussard had been dealing with a massive amount of pain and tried all sorts of remedies such as sports medicine, over-the-counter inflammatory pills and CBD ointment. In March 2020, he finally decided he had had enough, and we scheduled his surgery. Right before his surgery date, stay-at-home orders were put into place, and all elective surgeries were cancelled. It was a tough time for orthopedic teams everywhere; a lot of thought went into resource implications. The question on all of our minds was, "How can we safely take care of our patients down the road?"

As months went by and the fight against the pandemic carried on, the Memorial Hermann Orthopedic & Spine Hospital, part of the network of Memorial Hermann Joint Centers, became the pilot model for resuming safe, elective procedures and surgeries. Tight safety measures and processes were set in place to ensure the facility was ready to once again



*Courtesy of Memorial Hermann*

**Dr. Eddie Huang (left) with patient Timothy Broussard**

treat patients and their loved ones.

In July 2020, Broussard rescheduled his knee surgery. The procedure took just over one hour and, to my delight, three hours later, Broussard was already in physical therapy. That afternoon, Broussard was discharged and was able to return to the comfort of his home that evening. Looking back, I think Broussard's fearless and determined attitude is what helped the surgery go so well.

"If the procedure is safe, let's do it," said Broussard. And we did just that.

### Safety measures, protocol, innovations

Memorial Hermann Orthopedic & Spine Hospital teams are efficient with elective procedures, and oftentimes we're able to send patients home the same day. The truth is, we wouldn't be able to treat patients like Broussard without

the successful model we've set in place which includes, but is not limited to:

- Memorial Hermann Orthopedic & Spine Hospital maintains a COVID-19-free environment.
- Pre-procedure testing is mandatory for all Total Joint cases where patients will visit with a physician.
- Each patient has a dedicated surgeon to oversee the process, analyze their medical history and ensure it is safe to proceed with surgery, as well as a dedicated anesthesia team. In addition, each patient has a dedicated Total Joint navigator/coach that assists with pre-operative exercises, specific education related to Total Joint procedures, steps to prevent surgical site infections and tips for preparing the home.
- Orthopedic surgeons have prioritized giving patients oral medication instead of

IV medication, allowing most patients to recover at home along with certain preoperative nerve blocks to assist with pain management post-operatively.

- Memorial Hermann Orthopedic & Spine Hospital's dedicated, affiliated surgeons, leadership, physical therapists, nurses and ancillary team help provide an excellent patient experience and necessary patient education as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 landscape.

### Advice to those afraid to seek care

With a best-practices model safely in place, now is the time to reschedule the elective procedure you've been delaying. If you or a loved one is suffering, it's only making the condition worse. We want to decrease the anxiety and depression that is instilling fear in the wrong places and contributing to delays in care. We have protective measures in place for the safety of our patients.

**Although these are uncertain times, do not be afraid to get the medical care you need. Our patients' safety always comes first.**

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