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## The Painful Total Knee Replacement

Whilst total knee replacements are a highly successful procedure, there remains a group of patients who have dissatisfaction with their knee replacement. One of the most common causes for this dissatisfaction is persistent pain in the knee. This is usually very difficult and challenging situation for both the patient and the treating surgeon and the reasons for the persistent pain are often difficult to define. It is also important to recognise that there are often background levels of pain in the lower limbs for a variety of reasons and the persistent pain is not always attributable to the knee replacement.

In the setting of a painful total knee replacement a number of steps are usually followed. The first is to determine whether there is a technical reason for the persistent pain. This may be that the knee replacement is too loose or too tight, that the patellar does not move smoothly in the groove of the knee replacement or that the overall alignment of the knee replacement is sub-optimal. Other common causes of pain would include - loosening of the knee replacement, this may be due to mechanical or gradual loosening over time or may be reflective of infection. Infection in a joint replacement is often of a low-grade persistent nature and can be very difficult to diagnose. To try and determine some of the causes of these problems a series of x-rays including at times CT scans or bone scans may be undertaken. Blood tests to try and help determine the presence of infection are also typically useful.

It is also important to recognise that pain is a very complex phenomenon and that the causes of pain may represent a complex interaction between previous pain due to injury or arthritis, problems related to the operation or malfunction of nerves and pain processes in the post-operative setting. It is important in the setting of painful total knee replacements to work logically through these possibilities and for both the surgeon and the patient to be aware of how difficult this problem can be to treat.