



'Being back on the golf course is great'

A piece of **metal** saved me from a hip replacement

When Lorraine Birch, 37, a company director from Preston, was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, the future seemed bleak. Here she describes how a pioneering surgeon gave her a new lease of life...

Six years ago I began to get a dull ache in my right hip. I was

always very active, cycling, playing badminton and golf regularly. At first I thought I'd overdone it and the pain would go away if I eased up a bit. But it didn't, it just got worse. I went to my GP and was eventually referred to a consultant osteopath. It was worrying because nobody was really sure what was wrong with me. After months of tests I was eventually diagnosed with a disorder of the pituitary gland called acromegaly. One of the effects of the condition is that it can speed up osteoarthritis of the joints and that's why my hip was so painful. I was soon limping heavily and living in pain. I didn't

want to spend years taking anti-inflammatory tablets until doctors decided I was bad enough to warrant a total hip replacement. I badly wanted to get my quality of life back. But what alternative did I have? Fortunately, a friend read something about a different type of operation, called Birmingham Hip Resurfacing, which may save me from needing a hip replacement. It was performed by a consultant called Mr Derek McMinn who'd actually invented it and apparently it worked particularly well on young people with active lifestyles. I spoke to my GP but the operation wasn't widely available on the NHS then (it is now) so I had to use my private medical insurance if I wanted to go ahead. Before making a decision, I talked to people who'd had the operation, and was impressed when everyone I spoke to was entirely positive. Then I made an appointment with Mr McMinn. He told me he'd insert a specially moulded metal-on-metal joint over the head of the femur (thigh bone) and into the

hip. It's a major operation, but he'd done many of them and I felt safe in his hands. He also said he'd use a mini-incision he'd recently developed, which meant I'd have a relatively small scar. Mr McMinn explained, 'We've been doing this operation for 10 years and the failure rate over that time is 0.2 per cent for patients under 55. That's 100 times better than results for total hip replacement in patients with osteoarthritis of the hip. The metal device we've developed is unique and so stable that younger patients can return to very active lifestyles quickly.' The operation took two hours and afterwards I soon realised the deep-seated ache in my hip was gone. It was an incredible relief. I was walking around the ward on crutches just a day later. Within two weeks I'd walked three miles with sticks and in three weeks I was back at work. I also learnt to swim to gently strengthen my hip. I'm now hill walking again and went on a backpacking holiday to Greece last summer. Best of all I'm back on the golf course, which is fantastic.

DR TINA SAYS: Acromegaly leads to increased bone growth and deformity, and it's this deformity that makes osteoarthritis more likely. Although resurfacing is available on the NHS, not all orthopaedic surgeons do it. A GP refers a patient to a surgeon, but can't insist on a particular procedure—mainly because it might not be the right operation. It's less and less likely nowadays that access to this type of surgery is denied on cost—more usually that it isn't right for the patient's situation.

I was walking round the ward days after

The Facts

■ Around 210,000 people suffer from moderate to severe osteoarthritis of the hips each year. Birmingham Hip Resurfacing was developed in the Nineties by Mr Derek McMinn and his team at the Royal Orthopaedic &

Nuffield Hospitals in Edgbaston. The procedure is available on the NHS following guidance issued in 2002 by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

■ The worldwide failure rate for this operation since 1997 is 1.2 per cent for all age groups and all

diagnoses. The failure rate with conventional hip replacement is 19 per cent after 10 years for patients with osteoarthritis under the age of 55.

■ For more help contact www.hipresurfacing.com, or www.arthritiscare.org.uk



Claire Wood