



*Transplants offer new hope to younger joint patients.*

## **BONE TRANSPLANT**

When a patient's hip, knee, or ankle joint is ruined by arthritis or injury, the standard medical procedure is to implant an artificial joint. But this man-made device eventually loosens, requiring complicated, risky surgery to replace it. For this reason surgeons generally put artificial joints only in older, less-active patients, leaving younger people to suffer a painful joint condition during the best years of life.

But a promising, experimental operation just beginning to gain acceptance in mainstream medicine offers an alternative. A smooth sliver of cartilage and bone (from a deceased donor) is capped over the ravaged end of the patient's joint bone. Soon the healthy transplant fuses to the host bone, and the patient is able to function normally. Because foreign bone provokes only a feeble, passing immune reaction, immunosuppressive drugs are unnecessary.

"With this method, we hope the repaired joint will last a

lifetime," says Dr. Marvin Meyers, clinical professor of orthopedic surgery and rehabilitation at the University of California at San Diego. "We're up to eight years now," says Dr. Meyers, who has performed the transplant, which is known as osteochondral allograft surgery, 70 times, with a 79 percent success rate. One satisfied patient has actually climbed mountains after her operation, according to the doctor, and another has gone skiing.

"In the future," Meyers says, "I plan to use this technique on other joints: shoulders, elbows, wrists, and knuckles."—Eric Mishara