

10 OF THE BEST...

ARTHRITIS TREATMENTS

A. Vogel Atro-Bath Oil, 250ml, £9.99
CONTAINS spruce oil to relax muscles, and arnica and oil of wintergreen, both anti-inflammatories. From health stores nationwide. Call 01294 277344; www.avogel.co.uk

PainWave, £149.95
PEN-LIKE device that uses pulsed electrical current to restore essential blood supply, remove cell waste and relieve pain. Mail order: 0870 350 1264; www.anhealth.co.uk

Lubriline, £9.99 for 30 capsules
CONTAINS Celadrin (a blend of fatty acids similar to omega 3 and 6) to reduce inflammation and lubricate joint area. From Boots & Superdrug; www.lubriline.com

Deep Relief, 100g, £9.78
A GEL with ibuprofen to help with inflammation and provide pain relief, and menthol to soothe. From pharmacies nationwide. For stockists, call 01355 848484; www.mentholatum.co.uk

LitoZin Joint Health, £19.99 for 120 capsules
CONTAINS an anti-inflammatory called GÖPO, clinically proven to help minimise joint pain and stiffness, improving mobility. From Boots; www.litozin.co.uk

Norstar Knee Wrap, £49
MAGNETS inside this wrap are said to increase circulation, helping to flush out lactic acid and so reduce inflammation. Mail order: 01628 898366; www.vitalia-health.co.uk

LifeTime Stoptain Spray, 118ml, £9.95
ANALGESIC spray with menthol to cool and soothe, plus two anti-inflammatories. Mail order: 0800 3898195; www.victoriahealth.com

Gel Doctor Forfootsache Insoles, £4.95
REUSEABLE insoles provide cushioning to reduce pressure on joints. The liquid gel stimulates muscle action and increases blood flow. Stockists: 0176567 6077; www.geldoctor.com

Glucosamine24Seven, £11.99 for 30 patches
CONTAINS glucosamine and chondroitin, both proven to help relieve the pain of osteoarthritis. Mail order: 0871 871 8192; www.indigohealth.co.uk

Pernaton Gel, 125ml tube, £7.95
CONTAINS perna extract from the green lipid mussel, known to be good for joints and muscles. From independent chemists. Tel: 0121 444 6585; www.pernaton-uk.com

Magnetic hip that can last a lifetime

By THEA JOURDAN

A NEW type of magnetic hip replacement could last a lifetime, so avoiding the need for hazardous and painful further replacements.

At the moment, wear and tear means conventional hip replacements may last only around ten years.

But the MagneHip, the brainchild of British orthopaedic surgeons Paul Lee and Michael Clarke, contains a magnet which helps the prosthetic last at least three times as long.

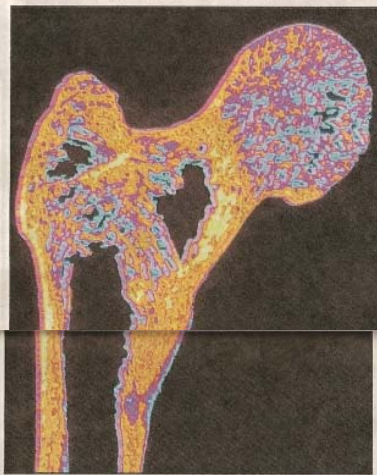
It is undergoing laboratory testing and should start clinical trials on NHS patients within three years.

Hip replacement operations are common among the over-50s due to natural erosion of the joints. Around 65,000 hip replacements are performed each year in Britain.

A significant number of patients need to undergo second or even third surgeries — because plastic and metal prosthetic joints can wear out after a decade and need to be replaced.

Revision hip surgery is more time-consuming than first-time replacements. The outcome is often less satisfactory because the bones have been weakened by the first surgery and provide a less secure base for the prosthetics. Patients tend to be older with more health problems, too.

Complete pain relief is less common than in first-time hip replacements and complication rates are twice as high.



Joint damage: Brittle hip bones need replacing

Many elderly patients cannot undergo the surgery at all because they are too frail, so have to cope with years of pain and poor mobility.

The MagneHip, which was recently named the Best Joint Replacement Idea at the 2007 Bone And Joint Innovation Awards, has the ability to deal with wear and tear.

As hip replacements move with the body, tiny bits of metal are worn off and become stuck in the joint. This causes the artificial hip to loosen, eventually leading to the need for a replacement.

The MagneHip has a built-in magnet and reservoir to trap debris before it becomes stuck in the joint. The design was inspired by motor vehicle engine lubrication systems, which also use magnets to filter debris.

The MagneHip does eventually wear down, but much more slowly than the conventional hip replacement because it is made entirely from hard-wearing chromium cobalt alloy.

A colleague and I worked on the idea for five years before we came up with a design

that solves the problem,' says Paul Lee, who has built a working prototype.

'It is all based on the workings of a car engine, which uses the same sort of system to make it last longer.'

Patients who have the magnetic hip implanted will not find themselves attracting metal objects.

'You won't feel yourself drawn to lamp posts or attracting iron nails,' says Mr Lee, who is based at Leicester's University Hospitals. 'The magnet has a powerful pull, but it has a limited range of only about 2cm.'

'It is a standard permanent magnet which has a lifetime of 1,000 years and so does not need replacing.'

Arthritis Care's Jane Spence welcomes the innovation. 'Hip surgery can bring dramatic improvement in mobility and quality of life' she says.

'For thousands of the nine million Britons with arthritis, it can mean a return to work and an active social life, instead of isolation and disability.'

'Breakthroughs in the field are exciting, and Arthritis Care welcomes any genuine advances in the search for ever more practical and effective treatments. We will be keenly interested in the results of the clinical trials.'

Meanwhile, in the U.S., patients may soon get a replacement made from diamonds. Diamiron is developing a diamond-coated hip implant system which could last a lifetime.

■ ARTHRITIS Care's free, confidential helpline is open weekdays, 10am to 4pm, tel. 0800 800 4050.

Bra that supports a pregnant belly

A SLING designed to support the stomachs of pregnant women can ease lower back pain, according to research.

Studies involving women between 20 and 36 weeks' pregnant with lower back or pelvic pain show that the sling, known as the BellyBra, reduced their symptoms and made them less likely to resort to painkillers.

Results of the trials, which also looked at Tubigrig elasticated support bandages as a means of reducing these pains, showed that women in the last ten weeks of pregnancy who wore either support found it easier to get up from being seated, and to get to sleep comfortably.

However, the BellyBra was more effective than the Tubigrig in alleviating pain during everyday physical activities such as walking.

Lower back pain is thought to affect about 50 per cent of pregnant women.

The BellyBra has a back panel that stretches up and down, providing support to the back and abdomen.

The research was carried out at Melbourne University in Australia.

Frogs may help beat superbugs

CHEMICALS in frog skin could be used to fight hospital superbugs.

Researchers in Italy have tested a variety of the infection-busting chemicals and found they destroyed bugs resistant to antibiotics.

The scientists are looking at ways to develop the frog skin agents into drugs.

Researchers first became interested in frogs' infection-fighting abilities in the Eighties. Along with some other amphibians, such as toads, frogs have a special coating of bug-busting chemicals that stop them from getting infected by dangerous organisms in the environment.

That early interest in frog skin has intensified with the emergence of human infections that are resistant to all known medicines. A team of Italian experts tested five different frog-skin chemicals in the laboratory and found they attacked drug-resistant bacteria.

Drug offers bowel cancer respite

A NEW drug for advanced bowel cancer slows down progression of the disease in some patients.

Vectibix can double the time before the disease starts to progress again in patients in whom it has already spread.

Those who stand to benefit most from the drug can be identified using a genetic test, say doctors.

Dr Maurice Slevin, consultant medical oncologist at the London Oncology Clinic, said: 'Targeting cancer treatments is critical for the future if society is going to afford the ever-increasing cost of innovative drugs.'

In trials, patients treated with Vectibix, made by Amgen, had longer periods without the disease progressing than those treated with the best palliative care available, which could include antibiotics, pain-killers, radiation therapy, corticosteroids, transfusions and psychotherapy.

Treatment with the drug doubled the average length of survival before the disease got worse from eight weeks to 16 weeks, with some patients lasting much longer without further spread.



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Product feature: Lubramine
Media outlet: Daily Mail
Date: 29th January 2008
Page: 44
Circulation: 2,323,858