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EVELYN KEMPER GOT A NEW BIKE FOR CHRISTMAS AND SHE'S RARING TO RIDE IT.

Sounds like any kid, right? Except Evelyn's 74 years old and she just underwent her second knee replacement. But age and physical limitations aren't going to put a damper on Evelyn's big plans.

Thanks to an innovative knee replacement strategy being performed by Dr.'s O'Neill and Kemmler and others at Joint Township District Memorial Hospital, Evelyn is confident she'll be able to stop dreaming like a kid and start playing like one instead.

"I'm hoping to get on the bike path soon," Evelyn says. "This is going to be my test."

The test will prove to Evelyn what she already believes: that her second knee replacement done just this past February, far surpassed her experience with the first one done several years ago. For her first surgery, Evelyn underwent traditional pain medications that were administered both orally and intravenously. But for her second one she tried something new.

Evelyn became one of the first patients at Joint Township District Memorial Hospital to undergo a knee replacement using a pain controlling procedure called a continuous femoral nerve block. The procedure blocks pain from the affected area through medication that runs directly over or near the femoral nerve. The femoral nerve is the main nerve to supply the front of the thigh and knee.

It is a drastic change from the use of traditional pain medications because it goes right to the source. As a result, it allows patients to experience little to no pain during the first 48 hours after surgery, which is typically the most painful period during recovery.

Evelyn remembers actually being able to get a good night's sleep after her second surgery – something that didn't happen the first time around. But her doctor and physical therapist recall the most important benefits.

"Most patients start physical therapy the very day of surgery," says Dr. O'Neill, Evelyn's orthopedic doctor who performed the surgery. "There is a big difference when they are able to start physical therapy pain free. Sometimes they are able to make a jump-start on their therapy and undergo much greater range of motion."

Dr. O'Neill, along with Dr. Kemmler and others, performs knee replacement surgeries using the femoral nerve block procedure. With the help of Dr. Annam, Joint Hospital's chief anesthesiologist, the hospital has helped their patients go pain-free for the first couple of days after surgery.

Teresa Stachler was Evelyn's physical therapist while she was in acute care and she

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says the difference in a femoral nerve block is astounding.

"A lot of patients who undergo this surgery aren't used to ingesting powerful pain medications so they can often experience negative side effects," she says.

Most patients are left lightheaded, nauseous or have low blood pressure, which all make early physical therapy very difficult. Only about 50 percent of patients are even able to get out of bed to do extremely simple movements.

But patients with the femoral nerve block are often able to do light activities like walking to an adjoining chair. Teresa remembers Evelyn's first movements being even more ambitious.

"The first morning she got up and walked to the bathroom and back, which is 20 feet, and she was so bubbly," she says. "She actually didn't express any pain at all in that leg."

Evelyn only spent three days in recovery within the hospital after her surgery. She then moved to the Transitional Care Unit for a seven day period before returning home able to do simple things like bathing, dressing and making lunch. She was also able to comfortably get around her home with the use of a walker. She continued her physical therapy three times a week for the next four weeks. Two weeks after leaving the hospital, she happily set her walker aside. The reduction in pain was amazing and knowing patients can work directly with the anesthesiologist to develop their own pain management program is a real plus.

Teresa believes the femoral nerve block plays a big role in getting patients back into their normal life.

"They get better quicker and get back on their feet quicker," Teresa says.

Evelyn would agree. She's become a big proponent of the new surgery and says she highly recommends it to anyone.

Meanwhile, she's excited to get on her bike and she's hoping to even take up regular walking for exercise. Those are both things that were extremely difficult prior to getting her new knees. She also looks forward to enjoying lighter activities like playing cards or watching her granddaughter play softball.