



# Devine Intervention

## CARTILAGE RESTORATION PUT PASTOR AND FATHER BACK IN THE GAME

Submitted by Sandi Constantino-Thompson

Mike Thompson is many things. A devoted father and husband. A dedicated pastor and youth leader. A sports enthusiast. What he is not is someone willing to become inactive at age 40. So when Mike began to see his life slow down due to severe knee pain, he took a big step toward greater mobility with cartilage restoration performed by OrthoCarolina sports medicine specialist James Fleischli, MD.

When Mike started working as a church youth leader in 1996, he combined his love of faith and sports to reach out to a growing congregation. On any given day, he could be found playing basketball, football, baseball or ultimate Frisbee with his family at church or at home, plus he was an avid hiker and backpacker.

By 2006, Mike became pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church in Morganton, and remained as comfortable on the ball court as he was behind the pulpit. His joints, however, didn't share that zeal. Years of wear and tear had taken their toll on Mike's knees, and he started to feel the pain and pressure of his athletic lifestyle, culminating in a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in his left knee.

While Dr. Mark Brazinski of Carolina Orthopedic Specialists in Morganton successfully repaired the ligament, Mike's pain remained and he soon learned that 60% of the cartilage in his knee was torn – a serious problem that demanded a long-term solution.

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Dr. Brazinski referred Mike to Dr. James Fleischli of OrthoCarolina for cartilage restoration.

“An ACL repair can stabilize the knee, but it can’t repair cartilage damaged by years of wear and overuse,” Dr. Fleischli explains. “When I met Mike, the cartilage around his patella [knee cap] had seriously deteriorated, causing extreme pain and loss of mobility.” An MRI revealed that Mike had two severe cartilage lesions: one at the medial femoral condyle (the lower part of the femur) with a large associated cyst, and the other at the trochlear groove where the knee cap sits. Due to the cyst, Mike needed a composite graft including a cartilage allograft (transplanted donor tissue), as well as a bone allograft.

On January 25, 2010, Dr. Fleischli performed both procedures, successfully restoring Mike’s joint and his future. “I had been in so much pain,” Mike asserts, “that after surgery, I immediately felt relief and recovery seemed easy. My muscles were sore from the procedure, but for the first time in years, my knee was pain-free.”

Eager to begin healing, Mike relied on crutches for six weeks and then dived into physical therapy for three months, concentrating on stretching and exercise to increase strength and range of motion. By June, he returned to OrthoCarolina and learned he could return to sports activity with a stronger, more stable joint and years of basketball ahead of him.

“We see cartilage damage and knee problems in people of all ages, but when someone is as young and athletic as Mike, our goal is to maintain an active lifestyle,” Dr. Fleischli emphasizes. “Years ago, a knee replacement might be his only option. But cartilage restoration offers a less aggressive way to preserve and restore a joint. And Mike’s great attitude and hard work only added to his success.”

Mike says he couldn’t be “more excited and optimistic” about his results. “Dr. Fleischli is not only extremely competent – he’s a nice guy and so easy to talk to. He not only restored my knee – he restored my life. I can go back to being active and avoid a major knee replacement. I might have to get into the over-40 league, but at least I can still play,” he laughs. “It’s a wonderful gift that Dr. Fleischli and God have given me. Thirty years ago, this surgery wouldn’t be possible, so I feel very blessed.” To that we say, “Amen.”

### GETTING BACK ON YOUR FEET

Although cartilage restoration rehabilitation and recovery can vary, here are general guidelines for returning to activity post-surgery.

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY ALLOWED
First 8 weeks	Use crutches and begin physical therapy
8-12 weeks	Off crutches and starting to walk
3-6 months	Light walking or cycling
6-9 months	Low-impact sports (swimming, skating, hiking, cycling)
9-12 months	Higher impact sports (jogging, running, aerobics)
12-18 months	Full impact sports (tennis, baseball, basketball and football)