The benefits of being active are countless and is something that we shouldn’t take for granted. As we age, our knees often times start showing signs of arthritis either from a previous injury, inflammatory disease or consequences of heredity. As arthritis progresses pain worsens, activity begins to slow, disfiguration may commence and lifestyle becomes more sedentary and overall health suffers. But there are ways to lessen knee pain and get back to life again.

Once pain in a joint begins, treatment with an anti-inflammatory medicine is the first step along with a weight loss program and quadriceps exercises to maintain muscle strength. If the anti-inflammatory medication doesn’t seem to help, then Cortisone or Synvisc injections may improve the aching. Active individuals may find the relief they’re looking for with ‘unloader’ braces. If these solutions don’t bring adequate relief or the knee develops significant contracture or deformity, then it’s time to consider the surgical answer to keeping mobile.

Less invasive total knee surgery is accomplished with the aid of Stryker Computer Navigation. This system utilizes technology similar to a GPS to guide orthopedic surgeons to ensure a small incision is as accurate as possible and provides as close to a perfect fit of the prosthetic as achievable. With recent innovations, patients reach mile markers faster in both motion and activity. Physical therapy begins quickly for a faster recovery, and most patients are up and walking the same day as surgery. While there is significant pain from surgery for the first few days, most patients say it feels much better than the pain experienced with their worn joint. The 95-percent satisfaction rate, which is incredible for surgical outcomes, is summed up by patients consistently saying, “I can’t believe I waited so long to have this done.”

Technology is making a big impact on total knee replacement surgery. Not only is the surgical equipment advanced, the prosthetics are likely to last longer than those from even five and ten years ago. North Valley Hospital, where I do most of my surgeries, has been instrumental in making sure the latest and greatest orthopedic technology is available to produce the best patient outcomes.

The most opportune age to receive this surgery is in one’s 60’s and 70’s. It’s important that one doesn’t wait too long to have the procedure because too much deformity can limit the amount that surgery can correct. However, you do want to try more conservative measures first to control symptoms. Most current prosthetics survive 15 to 20 years 95% of the time. Prevention is always the best treatment and avoiding injury to your knee is the most important thing you can do. If you have a history of a significant knee injury, stay away from hi-impact sports that include running and jumping. Other lifestyle considerations are to keep weight down, stay active, and maintain muscle strength.

Another surgery I commonly perform to resolve shoulder injuries is Arthroscopic Shoulder Repair. New instrumentation has made it possible for a minimally invasive option. Having a rotator cuff tear repair done traditionally requires an incision through the deltoid muscle, which is the most painful part of the surgery to recover from. Now, this improved technology utilizes a camera similarly used in laparoscopic operations through one of only four to five one-centimeter incisions. Having the procedure done this way doesn’t traumatize the muscle and it’s very nice to see how quickly patients feel better.

As with all surgeries, it’s important to follow your surgeon’s restriction recommendations. Minimally invasive surgery may decrease pain, but your body still needs to heal properly. In orthopedic procedures, the length of time to heal is typically the same, but the minimally invasive options decrease your pain making for an easier and more comfortable recovery.