Healthy bones and joints provide us with the ability to lead an active life and give us independence that we may take for granted, until injury or age hinders our abilities. Both bones and joints wear with use and the more active we are, the more chances for injury and additional weakening. The medical specialty of orthopedics has come a long way in developing more durable prosthetics, new treatments, and minimally invasive surgical procedures that can provide improved results for continuing an independent and dynamic life.

It's not unusual for Dr. Matthew Bailey, Board Certified Orthopedist at Flathead Orthopedics in Whitefish, to see several hundred patients a year of all ages. Whether a patient is 20 years old with a torn ACL from skiing or 65 needing a total joint replacement, Dr. Bailey has seen his fair share of unique cases and is adept at treating whatever comes through the door.

"Living in an area where most people lead active lifestyles skiing, hiking, and biking among other activities, it's a high-volume area for knee and shoulder injury," Dr. Bailey said. "In addition, we have an aging society, and with that comes a need to repair weakened, arthritic, and/or fractured bones and joints, such as hips, so our senior population can continue to lead independent, functional, and robust lives."

Taking the ladder approach to orthopedic concerns, Dr. Bailey prefers to begin treatment with non-invasive methods such as pain medicine, physical therapy, injections and braces prior to considering surgery. If pain or injury worsens and surgery is recommended, Dr. Bailey takes the necessary time to explain all the available options for each unique diagnosis including types of prosthetics, pain management, pre- and post-op physical therapy, and the benefits and limitations of different procedures.

Dr. Bailey said he is one of a few orthopedic surgeons in the Flathead Valley to consistently complete an entire shoulder rotator cuff repair arthroscopically. By choosing this minimally invasive option, patients experience only three to five small incisions as opposed to one large incision. He explains that performing surgery arthroscopically typically lessens pain and minimizes scar size.
Karyn Bogut of Columbia Falls recently underwent arthroscopic surgery for her shoulder with Dr. Bailey. She said she felt comfortable with him because he was up to date on the technology of her procedure and was straightforward when discussing her options.

“I was pretty impressed that I only had to get three small incisions with my shoulder surgery and not a big cut,” Bogut said. “Dr. Bailey did everything inside and I woke up to just small Band-Aids.”

Bogut was also pleased with the efficiency of her surgery process. Her nurse made a follow-up appointment before she left the hospital and checked on her after she was home.

“I have always been really happy with the care at North Valley Hospital because of the attentive staff,” she said. “I loved my pre-surgery massage and was happily surprised by the tasty take-home meal. The staff really cares about helping patients. They put effort into their care and it shows.”

For those patients staying overnight, North Valley Hospital has six certified orthopedic nurse coordinators who provide around-the-clock care as well as make follow-up calls while patients continue their recovery at home. Orthopedic nurse coordinators are specially trained in how to care for the particular needs of the orthopedic patient. They help guide them through their surgical experience at the hospital from a pre-surgery tour and education to pain management, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and steps for returning home. They also assist the doctors with discussing patient concerns and knowing what may or may not be a problem. This continuity of care is important to keeping the patient informed, which gives them peace of mind and enhances the recovery process.

“The certified orthopedic nurse coordinators add another layer of specialized observation where they may pick up on things that should have additional attention,” Dr. Bailey said.

Dr. Bailey has been practicing in Whitefish for ten years and performing about 300 orthopedic surgeries a year. In addition, he provides rotating coverage for the North Valley Hospital Emergency Department where an orthopedic specialist is available 24 hours a day. He moved here after completing his residency at Loma Linda University Medical Center, having received a clinical- and operative-based education. His medical degree was completed at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine. According to Dr. Bailey, the year he was accepted into the program, UCSF was ranked second for medical schools behind Harvard and was the most difficult college to get into in the nation. Since arriving at North Valley Hospital, he has been trained in the use of computer navigation for orthopedic surgery.

“Fixing orthopedic injuries has truly come a long way with longevity of prosthetics and minimally invasive options to consider,” he said. “Computer navigation provides a new twist on how to perform a total knee replacement. This technology helps the surgeon more accurately align the knee implants with the patient’s anatomy. It provides real-time information needed to allow for accurate alignment and positioning of the implant, which is an important prerequisite for joint stability, durability of the implant, and for sufficient range of motion.

Processes to assist recovery and pain also have advanced. Instead of prescribing large doses of narcotic pain medicine, patients now have the ability to control their discomfort by alternating different classes of medicines in smaller doses, resulting in fewer side effects with better pain control. Additionally, physical therapists are getting patients back on their feet sooner with more aggressive therapy protocols. Both are helping patients feel better faster and discharge from the hospital earlier than in the past.

“I am meticulous about my performance,” Dr. Bailey said. “I treat my patients the way I wish to be treated if I was in the same circumstance. At the end of the day, I want my patients to know what to expect, have a good experience, and have the best outcome.”

Dr. Bailey devotes a compassionate approach to patient care coupled with vast knowledge of current technological surgical advances to cater treatment options for every unique patient.