

# Staying Active When Your Body Says “No”

Aching knees and joints don't mean the end of your skiing days

It's nearly impossible to be an orthopedist in ski country and not hear the lamentations of Baby Boomer skiers and boarders who worry that their bodies are no longer keeping up with their daily demands. In Aspen, it's about wanting to ski the Dumps instead of cruising the groomers, about hiking Smuggler rather than strolling the Rio Grande Trail. Aching knees and hips are common as people enter their 50s and 60s—throw in daily hikes and mogul runs and the chances of debilitating injury or chronic pain only increase.

The cause is often osteoarthritis, a gradual, progressive joint failure that affects more than 50 million



**MAKE IT WORK:** Dr. Millett has gained a following of people who want to keep their joints healthy

adults. If a conservative course of treatment—less activity along with physical therapy and oral, topical, or injected medications—fails to provide long-term relief, surgery is often the only option. Total joint replacement, in which the joints are replaced by metal and plastic, is an effective option to reduce pain and increase range of movement, but it's often not a great choice for active individuals. The materials can break down over time, a likelihood greatly increased by high levels of activity. Luckily, there are a number of new, less invasive, joint-preserving surgeries that can keep you pain-free while carving the corduroy or battling the bumps.

A few centers focus on these joint-preservation techniques. These minimally invasive procedures include joint realignment, scar-tissue release, removal of bone spurs, and cartilage transplants. Often a number of these techniques can be used to treat the same injury; choosing the right one requires close consultation with your doctor.

The future of treating these injuries looks even brighter. Joint-preserving procedures are gaining popularity, particularly as we enter the age of regenerative medicine. Less invasive techniques typically have the added benefit of a quicker postoperative recovery. Stem cells and growth factors that will regenerate our worn-out parts are just on the horizon, and these types of treatments will only add to our options in the future.

So get out there and keep doing what you love. Doctors and researchers are hard at work making sure that your golden years will be especially so.

—Peter J. Millett, M.D.