It’s no secret that the largest generation of our time—the Baby Boomers—is aging, and of course physicians are seeing an increased need to treat many age-related ailments. One of the main areas is orthopedics.

“The older population is very active. They expect more and they want more. They are no longer satisfied with a more sedentary lifestyle,” said Dr. Jim Muccio, an orthopedic surgeon with TriHealth Orthopedic & Sports Institute. “They expect their bodies, in particular their knees and their hips to match their active lifestyles.” Yet these body parts are the most common to wear out with the aging process, resulting in an increased demand for total knee and hip replacements, according to Dr. Muccio.

The medical community is not just seeing an increase in total joint replacements. More seniors are coming in with ‘wear and tear’ injuries such as rotator cuff tears and meniscus tears that need to be treated surgically. “These are injuries that were more commonly seen in the younger population,” says Dr. Muccio. “As we age, our bodies just don’t repair themselves like they did when we were younger. A more active lifestyle coupled with the aging process tends to lower the threshold for overuse injuries.”

Dr. Muccio has also seen an increase in fragility fractures in seniors, usually due to loss of bone density. After the age of 35, men and women lose 1-2% of their bone density every year. Women, after menopause, accelerate this process losing 3-5% a year for a five to seven year period. With a decrease in bone density comes a decrease in bone strength.

When it comes to treating osteoporosis, Dr. Muccio brings a different perspective. Before he was an orthopedic surgeon, he was an aerospace engineer at NASA and studied the affects of osteoporosis on astronauts in a weightless environment. “Instead of losing 1-2% of their bone density a year, astronauts lose bone density at 1-2% a month. This could make them prone to fragility fractures after a long duration space flight, just like our aging population,” he says.

With respect to his choice of orthopedics after his engineering career, Dr. Muccio simply states, “Orthopedics was the most engineering-like. It focuses on the biomechanics of the human body. You don’t have to be an engineer to be a great orthopedist, but I think my engineering background gives me a unique perspective.”

The Orthopedic & Sports Institute helps seniors manage their arthritic conditions, treat their overuse injuries, and their fragility fractures associated with osteoporosis. In fact, TriHealth has performed more orthopedic surgeries than any other health care system in Greater Cincinnati using surgical techniques that have evolved to accommodate more demanding lifestyles. “Many surgeries are being done arthroscopically or through limited incisions reducing the pain associated with the procedure and the overall recovery time”.

“There has been a push in TriHealth to get greater access to health care,” says Dr. Muccio, and he and his fellow surgeons are prepared to meet the needs of seniors today and in the future.

James Muccio, MD, is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon with the TriHealth Orthopedic & Sports Institute. He sees patients in Montgomery, Mason and Hillsboro. To schedule an appointment, call 513 791 6611.