Sports Medicine Professionals

Athletes may deal with many different types of medical personnel after an injury. Athletes also may be referred by their primary care doctors to a sports medicine doctor or other sports medicine specialists for further evaluation and treatment. The following is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about the most common sports medicine specialists.

Sports medicine doctors (primary care)

Primary care sports medicine doctors are pediatricians, family medicine doctors, and other doctors with special training in sports medicine. Training includes 4 years of medical school and 3 years of general residency training. In addition, some have 1 to 2 additional years of fellowship training in sports medicine and a Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ). Primary care sports medicine doctors diagnose, treat, and manage musculoskeletal and medical problems, including the following:

- Sprains and strains
- Dislocations
- Ligament injuries
- Fractures
- Apophysitis
- Tendinitis
- Overuse injuries
- Cartilage injuries
- Exercise-induced asthma
- Concussions
- Nutrition and supplement issues
- Diabetes
- Eating disorders
- Stress fractures
- Heat illness
- Unique conditions of the athlete with special needs

Sports medicine doctors (orthopedic)

Orthopedic sports medicine doctors are orthopedic surgeons with special training that specialize in operative treatment. Training includes 4 years of medical school, 5 years of orthopedic residency, 1 year of additional study in sports medicine, and CAQ from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgery with the Sports Medicine Subspecialty Board Certification. Orthopedic sports medicine doctors diagnose, treat, and manage musculoskeletal problems including the following:

- Limb and spine deformities (such as club foot, scoliosis)
- Gait abnormalities (limping)
- Bone and joint infections
- Sprains and strains
- Dislocations
- Ligament injuries
- Fractures
- Apophysitis
- Tendinitis
- Overuse injuries
- Cartilage injuries

Certified athletic trainers

Your school or team may have a certified athletic trainer, or ATC, who may be the first person to evaluate you after an injury. They can help with assessing injuries, initial care, referring to doctors or other medical specialists, rehabilitation, and determining readiness for a safe return to play. Athletic trainers can also help organize injury prevention programs and help with taping, bracing, or special equipment to help protect or prevent injuries.

Certified athletic trainers must complete a 4-year college degree in athletic training and undergo rigorous testing to become certified and maintain their certification. Many go on to complete a master's program in sports medicine. Certified athletic trainers work closely with physicians, physical therapists, and other members of the sports medicine team. They can be a valuable liaison between the injured athlete and the coaches to help explain the injury and treatment.

Physical therapists

Your doctor may refer you to a physical therapist to help you recover from your injury. Physical therapists have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, although many have master's-level or doctoral training in the use of special

techniques to treat musculoskeletal injuries. This includes ultrasound, electric stimulation, massage, manual therapy, and therapeutic exercise. Physical therapists work with your doctor to set up individual exercise programs for general fitness and to help players with sport-specific skills. Some physical therapists are also certified as athletic trainers and can offer both services.

Chiropractors

Chiropractors receive a doctorate in chiropractic after 4 years of postgraduate training to deal with musculoskeletal conditions, injuries, and pain. Many chiropractors focus on the spine and alignment issues to treat an injury or pain. Chiropractic treatment often involves spinal manipulation and/or adjustments to correct possible malalignment.

Vigorous spinal manipulation in a young person who may already have a hypermobile or "loose" spine must be done with caution, if it is done at all. Any child with back pain should be examined by a medical doctor prior to chiropractic treatment. There may be other important aspects of diagnosis and treatment, including the evaluation for underlying medical conditions, use of specialized radiology studies, use of therapeutic exercise, and use of prescription medicines, which require the involvement of other specialists.

Podiatrists

Podiatrists are specialists for problems of the foot who receive 4 years of postgraduate doctoral-level training and then complete a 2- or 3-year residency. They are trained to diagnose and treat foot and ankle problems using both surgical and nonsurgical methods. Podiatrists can order x-rays or other special diagnostic tests, prescribe medicines, prescribe physical therapy, and create custom arch supports for foot problems if needed. While many lower body overuse problems can be linked to the foot, pain in the knee, hip, or back is not in the podiatrist's area of expertise.

Other sports medicine professionals

Other individuals and medical specialists may assist athletes with training, injury prevention, or injury management. These include personal trainers, massage therapists, acupuncturists, sports nutritionists, and sports psychologists. Each has specific training in their field. However, none of these specialists are certified to diagnose injuries, prescribe treatment, or give medical clearance to return to play.

Notes

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your health care professional. There may be variations in treatment that your health care professional may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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