



Phoenix Children's®
Herbert J. Louis
Center for Orthopedics and Sports Medicine

Frequently Asked Questions about Sports Medicine Treatment

What is physical therapy and how can it help me with my diagnosis?

Physical therapy involves working with a licensed health care professional on a variety of strength, flexibility and pain management techniques to aid recovery from an injury. Physical therapists can help patients reduce pain, improve function and reduce the risk of re-injury in the future. Many times physical therapy can prevent the need for surgery and long-term use of prescription medications.

As sports medicine physicians, we work very closely with physical therapists to teach patients how to prevent or manage their condition so that they will achieve long-term health benefits. Our sports medicine team, along with physical therapists, work together to develop a plan for each patient, using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function and prevent disability. In addition, physical therapy can also be utilized to prevent injury before it occurs by developing strength and fitness programs for athletes of all ages.

What's an MRI and when would I need one to help diagnose my condition?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a test that uses a magnetic field to make detailed pictures of structures inside the body. An MRI is an important tool used by the sports medicine physician to help in the diagnosis of musculoskeletal injuries or obtain detailed information for pre-surgical planning. In many cases, MRI tests give physicians information about structures in the body than can be seen with an X-ray.

An MRI also may show problems that cannot be seen with other imaging methods. Parents may be surprised to learn that for most of our patients, MRI scans are unnecessary and can be avoided. In many instances, an accurate diagnosis can be made using our experience and understanding of both the clinical history and physical examination.

How does the Sports Medicine Program manage fractures?

We strongly believe that pediatric and adolescent fractures are best managed by physicians with specific expertise and training in caring for children. Many times, children are treated with prolonged casting or improper technique that may be detrimental to a child's recovery process. Additionally, with our sports medicine training, we understand that some fractures are safe for sports participation when properly protected.

Why am I seeing a sports medicine specialist for a concussion?

The Pediatric Concussion Program at Barrow Neurological Institute at Phoenix Children's Hospital is a multidisciplinary clinic dedicated solely to the care of pediatric patients who have suffered a mild traumatic brain injury. The program includes a clinic dedicated to the assessment and care of young athletes who have suffered sports-related concussions. Our sports medicine physicians are uniquely qualified in the specifics of concussion management and returning athletes to play after injury. The Sports Medicine Program is just one part of a collaboration with pediatric neurosurgery, neurology and neuropsychology at Phoenix Children's to treat and care for children with traumatic brain injury.

What is the difference between a sports medicine specialist and an orthopedic surgeon?

Sports medicine specialists and orthopedic surgeons are both very well trained in musculoskeletal medicine. Sports medicine physicians specialize in the non-operative treatment of musculoskeletal conditions and understand the need for surgical intervention. Orthopedic surgeons are also trained in the operative treatment of these conditions, but approximately 90 percent of all sports injuries are nonsurgical.

The sports medicine physician has in-depth knowledge of non-operative treatment, as well as when surgical treatment is indicated. A sports medicine physician also understands the need for appropriate referrals to physical and occupational therapies, and if necessary, can refer to an orthopedic and sports medicine surgeons.