

Sports Medicine Doctors: A Resource for Parents and Coaches

By Kristin Smith, CFT

As the number of students athletes grow, so too do the number of injuries and medical ailments that affect developing bodies and require medical attention. From ankle sprains and shin splints to exercise-induced asthma and obesity, parents and coaches are often pressed to find a doctor or health care provider who can treat it all.

Sports medicine doctors are an increasingly valuable community sports medicine resource: they provide comprehensive medical care for active people of any age. Their training and experience prepares them to care for it all and to refer to a specialist when necessary. They work closely with orthopedic surgeons, physical therapists and certified athletic trainers to return athletes to an active lifestyle and competition as quickly and as safely as possible.

What is a Sports Medicine Doctor?

Sports medicine doctors are usually doctors of family, pediatric or internal medicine who care for active people and athletes of any age. They are trained to diagnose and treat injuries and health problems that affect sports participation and an active lifestyle.

More than 85 percent of muscle and joint injuries don't require surgery. Sports medicine doctors use non-surgical methods to treat spine, hip, shoulder, knee and foot injuries. Examples include ankle sprains, concussions, knee and shoulder injuries, and stress fractures. Sports medicine doctors also care for health conditions that affect activity too, such as asthma, arthritis, nutrition problems, and poor fitness. They teach people how to prevent injuries and become healthier.

Specialized Training

Sports medicine doctors receive ongoing sports medicine training and usually serve as team doctors for local high schools or colleges. Most have completed a sports medicine fellowship or have earned a Certificate of Added Qualifications (CAQ) in sports medicine. Many teach student doctors and lecture on sports medicine topics.

Some sports medicine doctors develop special medical expertise in areas that include:

- athletic eating disorders
- women's health issues
- metabolic disorders
- low back injuries
- skin infections

Many doctors serve as medical consultants or doctors for college or professional sports teams. Here in Minnesota, many work with the Minnesota Vikings, Minnesota Timberwolves, Minnesota Wild, University of Minnesota athletic programs, Minnesota Thunder, the Minnesota State High School League and area colleges.

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How to Choose a Sports Medicine Doctor

Sports medicine is not a certified medical specialty but doctors who have completed a CAQ are recognized by national accreditation organizations as sports medicine specialists. Other criteria, such as experience and percent of time spent treating athletes, can also help you to determine if your doctor is qualified to diagnose and treat sports injuries. Start by asking these questions:

- How long have you treated athletes?
- What kind of training have you had?
- What percent of your patients are athletes? Most sports medicine doctors practice sports medicine part-time. Choose a doctor who treats athletes 25 to 40 percent of the time.
- Are you a team doctor for a local team?
- Are you a member of a sports medicine organization?

Twin Cities Area Resources

The Twin Cities metro area is home to more than 50 sports medicine doctors who have completed fellowships in sports medicine and/or earned their Certificate of Added Qualification in sports medicine and see patients in private practice. Sports medicine doctor services are usually covered by insurance.

Minnesota Sports Medicine's network of 14 sports medicine doctors includes those who serve as medical consultants for Minnesota's professional sports teams, the University of Minnesota Athletic programs and more. To find a sports medicine doctor in your area, call Minnesota Sports Medicine at 612-273-4800 or visit www.mnsportsmed.org.

Minnesota Sports Medicine is a network of orthopaedic and sports medicine physicians who see athletes in medical clinics throughout the Twin Cities. Minnesota Sports Medicine is a partnership of Fairview Health Services and Twin Cities Orthopedics, P.A.