

Sports Medicine Program

Moving In The Right Direction

By: Deborah Liv Johnson



Eisenhower physical therapist and athletic trainer Mark Albert assesses balance control using a uni-axial tilt board.

It's pretty simple. We aren't pretzels or Gumby dolls and most of us can't dance like Baryshnikov. But we do enjoy a brisk game of tennis or a round of golf or other activity several times a week. And although we may not be on the cusp of breaking into professional sports, maintaining good habits before, during and after an activity is critical — for amateurs and professionals alike. Warming up and stretching are two basic preventive activities, but there are many things one can do to stay healthy and active and avoid injury.

In the event that you have attempted a few wild Gumby moves or you can't remember what happened, but you're experiencing some unexplained muscle pain, it may be time to talk to the experts. Eisenhower Medical Center and Desert Orthopedic Center have joined together to provide a comprehensive Sports Medicine Program that offers specialists in orthopedics and sports medicine. They provide individualized treatment to assess your pain and create a rehabilitation program to get you back on track. They also provide comprehensive conditioning programs to minimize the risk of a sports injury. Their mantra is, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

No matter what your level of athletics is, you have access to one of the finest sports medicine programs in the country. L. Sam Reber, MD, Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon at Eisenhower Medical Center is the program's Medical Director. Following a Fellowship at the Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic in Los Angeles during which time Dr. Reber worked with the Dodgers, Kings, Angels and Lakers, he headed east to the desert and signed on as the sports medicine director for Eisenhower Medical Center and Desert Orthopedic Center.

"I love sports," says Dr. Reber. "In college I played tennis and volleyball and swam. I still play tennis, along with racquetball, biking, waterskiing and snow skiing."

Although sports medicine predates the Ancient Olympics in 776 B.C., the term "sports medicine" was coined in 1928 at the St. Moritz Olympics where planning began for the First International Congress of Sports Medicine. While the term generally applied to professional athletes, now sports medicine applies to anyone who is active.

"There's no doubt that professional athletes are attracted to the valley. High level and professional athletes love to come down and play golf...or they've heard about the Eisenhower facilities," explains Dr. Reber. "They come here during the off-season to do rehab. We want them to know that while they're here, this is the place to come and be treated if they need anything." In addition to these higher-level athletes, residents and visitors now benefit from the many programs and sports medicine offered at Eisenhower Medical Center and Desert Orthopedic Center.

When injuries do occur, Dr. Reber and his colleagues have many options for treatment. "Ninety percent of what I do is arthroscopic surgeries [minimally invasive surgeries with a small incision and an endoscope]. More and more surgeries are becoming arthroscopic. We can now do anterior cruciate ligament [a ligament connecting the femur to the tibia at the knee] or rotator cuff [muscles and tendons that attach the arm to the shoulder and allow rotation] repairs arthroscopically. As a result, many of these procedures can be done as an outpatient."

In addition to the physician-related care available at Eisenhower, the Sports Medicine team includes Physical Therapists who are Board Certified in Orthopedics and Sports, and are Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialists (CSCS). Derek Spinney, PT, CSCS, is the Director of Rehabilitation Services at Eisenhower Medical Center. "Everything has been more accelerated in terms of rehab. Patients are spending less time in the hospital following surgery. We now have minimally invasive total hip replacements where the patient may go home the same day, after the surgery."

As with most types of physical rehabilitation, movement is vital. Spinney explains, "Tissue responds to the 'stresses' that are placed on it. If you immobilize something, the tissue responds by contracting or scarring, resisting movement. As long as you know what you're doing, and you 'stress' the tissue in the appropriate way, you can prevent unwanted scarring and stiffness, increase the strength of the supporting structures [muscles], and achieve the optimal outcome."

According to Spinney, many patients enjoy an ongoing relationship with the Sports Medicine Clinic. They often form a bond with the physical therapist and trust his or her judgment on everything related to their conditioning and activities, not just the original condition they came in for.

One of the most popular programs is the Golf Enhancement Program (GEP) headed by Mark Albert, PT, ATC, SCS, Board Certified Physical Therapist at Eisenhower Medical Center. The program takes a comprehensive look at golfing skills and the body's ability to support those skills. One of the things that Albert looks at is the baseline range of motion and strength. According to Albert, the mission of the GEP is to foster enjoyable, successful and pain-free golf for every handicap level and to help players maintain fitness that promotes lifelong participation in the game. In contrast to swing analysis or golf lessons, GEP is designed to assess a battery of physical skills that can optimize golf performance, while preventing injury and removing problems that can contribute to chronic pain syndromes.

In addition to serving valley residents, the Desert Orthopedic Center/Eisenhower Medical Center Sports Medicine Program provides services to the valley's numerous professional sporting events and tournaments as well as outreach to local schools in the form of Certified Trainers. Lectures and presentations are also provided throughout the year, often hosted by one of the many country clubs in the valley. Sports medicine is designed to keep us moving in the right direction, for as long as we choose to participate in the activities we love.

For additional information on the Sports Medicine Program, call Eisenhower's Physical Therapy Department at 760-773-2033.