

# SPORTS INJURY SPECIALIST

Sports medicine and surgery is not just for the élite athlete, says *Mr. Rahul Patel*

As a sports orthopaedic surgeon, I've been lucky to be involved in the management of elite athletes' injuries – but I also want to dispel myths that sports medicine is better abroad. Historically, countries such as Germany and the US have offered superior sports injury treatment (and charged accordingly!) but I believe the UK is just as adept in this type of injury management. Where we are better, is in offering this level of expertise to sports participants of all levels within our existing healthcare framework.

One can't deny the benefits of participating in regular sport and today, a greater percentage of the population engages in some form of exercise during the week than ever before. The prospect of the London Olympics 2012 is increasing enthusiasm for sport, and hopefully the Games will provide the driving force to sustain sporting interest into the future.

It makes sense therefore that injuries arising from sport are becoming more common. For example, as this article goes to press, thousands are in the final throes of training for the London Marathon – but every year, injury strikes for the unlucky minority, quashing ambitions and preventing participation.

## **SO, IF WE ARE SEEING MORE SPORTS INJURIES, ARE WE GETTING BETTER AT TREATING THEM?**

The answer is yes. The field of sports medicine is evolving. Sports and Exercise Medicine became a recognised speciality within the NHS in 2005 and the challenges of the diagnosis and management of sports injuries presents the opportunity to improve musculoskeletal care through advances in diagnostics, new medical and surgical approaches to promote repair, and enhanced rehabilitation strategies.

## **SO, WHAT KIND OF INJURY IS SUSTAINED DURING SPORT? OVERUSE (REPETITIVE DEMAND) AND TRAUMA (ISOLATED TRAUMATIC INJURY).**

Most are overuse injuries: tissue damage that results from repetitive demand. Tissues adapt to the stresses placed on them over time – but as they adapt, they can incur injury unless they have appropriate time to heal. The rate of injury exceeds the rate of adaptation.

Changes in training and poor biomechanics are some of the factors that can affect the rate of recovery. Shin splints are a classic example. Inevitable cessation of activity whilst the injury is treated (followed by extensive rehabilitation, conditioning, and training changes) before a gradual return to activity, can make the recovery process long and frustrating.

No wonder then that the focus has switched to prevention. Today, sports clinics and NHS hospitals are not only populated by physiotherapists, but by nutritionists, podiatrists, orthotists, physiologists, strength and conditioning coaches, sports physicians and specialists in alternative therapies, to assess, analyse and guide patients in their prevention process or injury management.

I'm an orthopaedic surgeon, specialising in the surgical treatment of sports injuries of the hip, knee or shoulder. Overuse injuries seldom require my intervention, but traumatic injuries (e.g. shoulder dislocations or knee ligament ruptures) often require my expertise.

The field of orthopaedic sports medicine has evolved at a fast pace since the advent of keyhole



surgery (arthroscopy) in the 1980s. I use arthroscopy to reconstruct soft tissue (cartilage, ligament, tendon and bone) injuries in a minimally invasive manner, with increased accuracy and utilising the latest biomaterials. This technique confers the advantages of shorter recovery times, fewer complications, less time off work and more importantly, less time away from sport.

So this summer, should you be unlucky enough to get injured through sport, be rest assured that sports medicine is not just for the elite athlete, it's for you too.

For more information, visit [www.thewellingtonhospital.com](http://www.thewellingtonhospital.com) or call the Enquiry Helpline on 020 7483 5148

## **FACT BOX**

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Mr. Patel offers investigation and options of surgical management for soft tissue injuries of the hip, knee and shoulder. He also has a special interest in cartilage preservation and regeneration. Mr. Patel also co-runs the MSc in Sports Medicine, Exercise & Health at University College London.

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