

SPORTS MEDICINE ADVANCES KEEP PLAYERS ON THE ICE LONGER

At every Columbus Blue Jackets game you attend, you see dozens of players on the ice and thousands of fans in the stands. But what you rarely see is the small army of sports medicine physicians and staff working behind the scenes to keep all those players healthy and on the ice today and for years to come.

It's no surprise that hockey injuries happen all the time at the professional level. After all, in addition to getting hit by sticks, gear and walls, players have to contend with other skaters traveling up to 30 mph and pucks traveling in excess of 100 mph!

Taking care of our Blue Jackets requires a team of healthcare professionals:

- Six OhioHealth doctors, including myself, form the core treatment team
 - Two orthopedic surgeons
 - Two primary care physicians
 - Two maxillofacial surgeons
- Three full-time athletic trainers working both on and off season
- A training room nearly big enough to treat the entire team of 23 players at the same time
- A weight room the size of a small health club
- A fully stocked doctor's office with equipment for suturing, examining eyes and even a dental chair
- Advanced X-ray equipment allowing us to immediately screen players for any broken bones

- An average of 700 anti-inflammatory tablets, 500 antibiotic pills and 40 pints of massage oil used each year!

Despite all the injuries — both minor and severe — hockey players are playing longer than ever before. Twenty years ago, the average age of an NHL player was 25. Now it's up to 28. By the end of this year, eight players will be 40 or older. Better rules and better equipment have made the game safer. Athletes are much better conditioned and are more fit and stronger than their predecessors. Advances in sports medicine have made a difference too.

Diagnosis of the exact nature of injuries is much more precise. MRI is the best example — giving us the ability to know the status of an injury in less than an hour. The detail of this information would have been unimaginable 25 years ago.

In addition, the development of minimally invasive arthroscopic surgery means faster recovery times with fewer complications. Rehabilitation has also become much more sophisticated, allowing athletes to come back quicker and easier from injuries previously thought to be career-threatening.

NHL veterans work very hard to stay at the top of the game. But, aging affects all of us, taking away speed, flexibility and the ability to recover from injuries rapidly. Team physicians spot these changes in a number

of ways. Muscle and tendon injuries increase in frequency as flexibility goes down. The older hockey player finds that groin and rotator cuff strains happen more often. Everything heals slower and the scar tissue that forms at the site of injury is more prone to recurring injury. It's our job to work with the athlete to evaluate these continuing injuries to determine how long a player can — and should — safely remain on the ice.

IF YOU'RE A RECREATIONAL ATHLETE, YOU CAN FOLLOW STEPS TO EXTEND YOUR COMPETITIVE YEARS AS WELL.

Follow these tips to help you stay out of the training room and the doctor's office. If you haven't been working out and you are over 30, check with your physician first to get the green light:

- Stretch before and after activity using long, slow stretches rather than rapid, short bounces
- Spend time warming up and cooling down — calisthenics, a slow jog or a stationary bike work well
- Cross-train to work different muscle groups, avoid overuse injury and minimize the potential for staleness
- Always use good technique
- Listen to your body — if you develop pain, forget "no gain" — back off and start ice and ibuprofen or the equivalent. If improvement isn't rapid, see your doctor.

Visit www.GetInTheGameOhio.com for more tips from our sports medicine team or to find a physician.



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