



Back in the Game — New Way to Treat Sports Hernias

“It’s an innovative surgical technique that has allowed our athletic patients, including Olympic competitors and professional athletes, to successfully return to their sport of choice, including hockey, soccer, track, marathon running, golf, basketball and others.” - Richard Cattey, M.D., General, Vascular and Laparoscopic Surgeon, Columbia St. Mary’s

Sports hernias can cause pain for athletes professional or amateur.

“While we mostly hear about professional and college athletes getting a chronically painful groin injury adjacent to the pubic bone, called athletic pubalgia or sports hernia, it could happen to anyone who exercises a lot,” said Dr. Richard Cattey. Dr. Cattey is a general vascular and laparoscopic surgeon for Columbia St. Mary’s and a founding member of the Milwaukee Institute of Minimally Invasive Surgery. He also is chief of surgery for Columbia St. Mary’s Hospital Ozaukee.

“If you’ve been injured or have developed groin pain in the absence of any other cause, you should be evaluated for sports hernia,” he added.

Groin pain is most commonly caused by muscle and tendon strains of muscles crossing the hip joint. It also can be related to abnormalities within the abdominal wall.

“Typically in these cases, MRIs or X-rays are normal, so it’s a difficult diagnosis to make,” he said. “It’s a good idea to see someone who is an expert in the field.”

According to Dr. Cattey, a sports hernia is a muscle tear that comes after repeated exercise or training. It can take an athlete out of contention for extended periods of time. Traditional surgery was once the only treatment for this condition. Now, a less invasive surgery can get athletes back to their game quicker and with minimal pain during recovery.

“The two sports most commonly affected are soccer and hockey, in that order, because those sports are hardest on that area of the body. You’re opening up your hips to either kick a soccer ball or to skate. Actually, it could happen in any sport that puts a lot of pressure on that area.”

Although there’s no good way to prevent this type of injury, it’s a good idea to utilize stretching in workout routines, he said.

How can a sports hernia be corrected?

Up until several years ago, corrective surgery was invasive, involving a six- or seven-inch-long incision. And the patient was usually forced to be inactive during a 12-week recovery period.



“If there are no complications, an outpatient surgical procedure is performed,” Dr. Cattey explained. “The surgeon makes three 1/2-inch incisions and inserts precisely designed laparoscopic instruments to see muscle damage and perform the repair. To reinforce the affected area, a patch of mesh-like material is used, held in place with surgical tacks.

“We utilize the laparoscope, a fiber optic camera that allows us to see on a monitor the space where we operate, and the mesh is used to reinforce the repaired area. Most individuals can expect minimal pain, and can resume normal activity in four or five days, and can do some form of aerobic exercise in two weeks. They can usually start playing their sport between four and six weeks.”

According to Dr. Cattey, who has a 96 percent success rate for this type of surgery, laparoscopic repair of sports hernias is a precise, surgical procedure developed by surgeons at the Milwaukee Institute of Minimally Invasive Surgery. It’s only performed by a few surgeons worldwide.

“It’s an innovative surgical technique that has allowed our athletic patients, including Olympic competitors and professional athletes, to successfully return to their sport of choice, including hockey, soccer, track, marathon running, golf, basketball and others.”

The Milwaukee Institute of Minimally Invasive Surgery is located at Columbia St. Mary’s. Established 13 years ago by a group of leaders in the field of minimally invasive surgery, it was the Midwest’s first multi-specialty surgical center of its type. According to Dr. Cattey, the institute was conceived because of a strong desire to provide the most innovative surgical care and treatment for patients.

Dr. Richard Cattey, (262) 243-0064