

Dr. Christopher Yeung – Getting Down to the ‘Core’



Have a peek into the life of Dr. C. Yeung – our resident sports fanatic and orthopedic surgeon for the Arizona Diamondbacks. How does he treat athletes and non-athletes alike? In a recent Q&A session, Dr. Yeung discusses pre and post surgical

care and injury prevention.

You work with the Arizona Diamondbacks. What inspired you to work with professional athletic teams?

I've always been a sports fanatic and that is one of the reasons I went into orthopedic surgery. I wanted to sub specialize and was torn between spine and sports medicine. I ended up getting the best of both worlds and chose to do a spine Fellowship with Dr. Robert Watkins, who is considered the expert in sports spine injuries. Because of this background, it was natural for me to become involved in the local Arizona teams.

Do you find recovery time a challenge when working with athletes during the season?

Athletes are incredibly frustrated by losing time to injury. They always want to get back to their sport as quickly as possible and help the team, but don't want to jeopardize their career by coming back too soon. As the surgeon, I have to give the player the best scientific advice that I can to help make the best and safest decision on when they can return to play.

What can your average patient learn from athletes you've treated?

When athletes get hurt they put in a lot of work to get back in playing shape. Surgery is often only the first step in recovery. Surgery can rapidly alleviate the acute pain from a compressed nerve, but to return to an elite level of performance and prevent further injury athletes must rehabilitate intensively to counteract any atrophy from nerve damage or simply from disuse. All patients should embrace core trunk stabilization to help recovery from surgery and to prevent further injury.

What can the average patient do to prevent injuries?

Patients need to have strong core stabilizers to help protect their spine. Yoga and Pilates are excellent activities to help with this in addition to formal physical therapy. Aerobic low impact activity also helps nourish the relatively avascular discs by promoting diffusion of nutrients across the vertebral endplates.

What lifestyle changes do you recommend to avoid major surgeries?

Patients need to control their weight to avoid that “spare tire” around their waist. Drink more water and if you need something sweeter, try diluting the drink by mixing 2 parts water. Even the “healthy” sports drinks and flavored waters can pack serious calories. Patients should also try to get more daily exercise. Try adding little activities like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking to your colleagues' office to talk rather than just calling on the phone, and engaging your core muscles many times per day randomly.

What do you find is the goal of your patients when coming to see you?

Most patients are in pain and simply want to be out of pain. It is my task to find the cause of the pain and help them eliminate it.

Dr. Christopher Yeung was magna cum laude at the University of California San Diego and graduated in the top 5% of his class at the University of Southern California School of Medicine. He is a board certified, fellowship trained orthopedic spine surgeon, with a special interest in minimally invasive spine surgery techniques with a philosophy of choosing the least invasive yet most effective method to treat spine problems. He has been the principal investigator in many FDA studies, including Flexicore lumbar artificial disc replacement, Cervicore cervical artificial disc replacement, and DASCOR total nucleus replacement.

When not working, Dr. Yeung enjoys travel, golf, SCUBA, sport fishing, camping, volleyball, snow skiing, water skiing, tennis, basketball, and time spent with his family.

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