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## **Consider Sport in Lumbar Spine Surgical Repair Checklist - Brief Article - Statistical Data Included**

Doug Brunk

SAN DIEGO -- When you are referring an athlete with a lumbar spine injury for surgery, make sure that the surgeon is well versed in the requirements of the patient's sport, Dr. Robert Watkins advised at the annual meeting of the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine.

"You have to understand the position the guy plays and how to take the rehabilitation program onto the field," according to Dr. Watkins, who is director of the Center for Orthopedic Surgery at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

He and his associates recently followed that advice after operating on a member of the U.S. Olympic synchronized swimming team.

"I wouldn't have any idea what their season is," he said, "so I had to find out and ask about the sport.

You also want to refer to spine surgeons who recommend a thorough preoperative rehabilitation program, Dr. Watkins said.

Before he and his associates operate on any athletes, they send them to physical rehab to learn strengthening exercise that they will use after surgery "The way I sell that to the patient is that I say 'You have to learn these exercises anyway. You have to use them after the surgery, so you might as well learn them beforehand,'" Dr. Watkins explained.

The timing for surgery depends on when you think that you can get athletes back to play and when it's necessary for them to play. Most surgeries on athletes are performed during the offseason. Find out what their symptoms are, what's important to them, and what their concerns are, he advised.

Before surgery Dr. Watkins makes it a point to discuss the procedure in his office with the patient and as many people in the decision-making process as possible at the same time, including parents, coaches, trainers, agents, and other physicians who are involved in the athlete's care.

"Stick to the general medical facts and tell everybody the same thing," he advised.

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