



Atlas Physical Therapy

Helps Butterfly Swimmer Regain Her Wings



A young swimmer and active middle school student found exactly the therapy she needed to get back to competitive condition after a shoulder injury. Claire Harvey, 13, first came to Atlas Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine at the recommendation of her pediatric orthopedic surgeon, David Mandel, M.D. She worked with Atlas owner Ron Berger, who is a registered physical therapist and certified athletic trainer.

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“Claire had suffered the type of rotator cuff injury we see in a lot of competitive swimmers - female swimmers especially,” says owner Ron Berger. “It's a typical swimming injury caused by overuse. Competitive swimmers train very hard. They tend to be very flexible and go through wide range of motion in their swimming strokes, especially butterfly, backstroke and freestyle. This puts stress on the rotator cuff, which is what helps stabilize the arm bone in the socket. What happens with swimmers is the front of the shoulder tends to get stretched and it doesn't ever quite tighten back up. The result is instability of the shoulder and pain.”

“When I first came to Atlas, I'd been told that surgery might be an option, but to try and do PT first,” says Claire, who specializes in the butterfly and long distance freestyle and competes in championship swim meets. The therapy helped, but surgery was still needed.

“Claire's shoulder instability impaired her ability to compete as a swimmer,” says Mandel. “We performed an arthroscopy to assess her rotator cuff and labrum, and then did an open procedure to tighten her shoulder capsule to stabilize the shoulder.”

Claire was offered the option of trying another facility for her post-surgery rehabilitation. “Atlas is such a comfortable place, and they make it fun. They're like your other family, and they've helped me through a lot. So I said no! I want to go back to Atlas,” she says emphatically.

“After surgery like Claire's, we recommend three phases of therapy,” says Mandel. “In the first few weeks post surgery we have patients work on regaining their range of motion. Then after four to eight weeks they can work on strengthening. In the final phase, four to six month post surgery, they can begin sport-specific exercises.”

“When I came back to Atlas, we worked very slow,” says the teen, who's also active in the LaVilla theater department. “At first, I didn't have a lot of range of motion. But by November, it was a lot better. I was able to be stage manager for the musical 'Dear Edwina,' call the shots and move sets on and off the stage.”

“One of the biggest challenges in working with young swimmers is to pace their rehab appropriately as the repair is healing,” says Berger. “I swam competitively in my junior high and high school years and I know exactly what they're going

through. Usually these patients are so motivated to get back to swimming so quickly that we have to rein them in as the healing takes place. Swimmers respond very well to exercising, and they have a good base to start from because their muscles are so conditioned prior to surgery. So we work on keeping them motivated and interested while putting certain restrictions on their pace. We work on such things as gentle range of motion, then progress into light weights and light manual resistance - using a medicine ball, for example.”

The team at Atlas approaches therapy differently than some, says Berger. “At the beginning of therapy, we do a lot of hands-on work. In some facilities, the patient may be told to go push against the wall on their own. But we emphasize the manual aspect, so that the therapist can get immediate feedback on how the patient perform the various movements. Then, during each phase of rehab, we continue to include some type of manual work.”

“The progression for swimmers in rehab takes time, and we have to assess each individual to make sure they aren't taking it too fast,” Berger continues.

“Eventually, they can return to the pool, and they love our warm-water therapy pool here. It's rewarding to see swimmers progress from no movement to actually returning to their sport in front of our eyes.”

Claire has now recovered almost full range of motion, and continues to progress. “The number one best thing Atlas was able to accomplish is to get her back to swimming by helping her regain range of motion and strength,” says Mandel. “Sport-specific rehab is very helpful in a getting athletes back to sports activities.”

“My next goal is to get ready for next year's championship, and the summer Junior Olympics,” says Claire. “I'm really happy, because I wasn't supposed to get back in the water and kicking for another month and I have been doing it for several weeks now.”

Modalities and Procedures

Ultrasound

Iontophoresis/Phonophoresis

Electrical stimulation

Cryo/Hydrotherapy

Paraffin

Post-op procedures for joint replacement

Soft tissue and Joint mobilization/massage

Mechanical traction

Therapeutic exercise

Aquatic therapy

Aerobic and cardiovascular exercise

Gait training

Biofeedback

Atlas Physical Therapy accepts most insurance plans. Hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturdays 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.



NO EXCUSES, JUST RESULTS

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