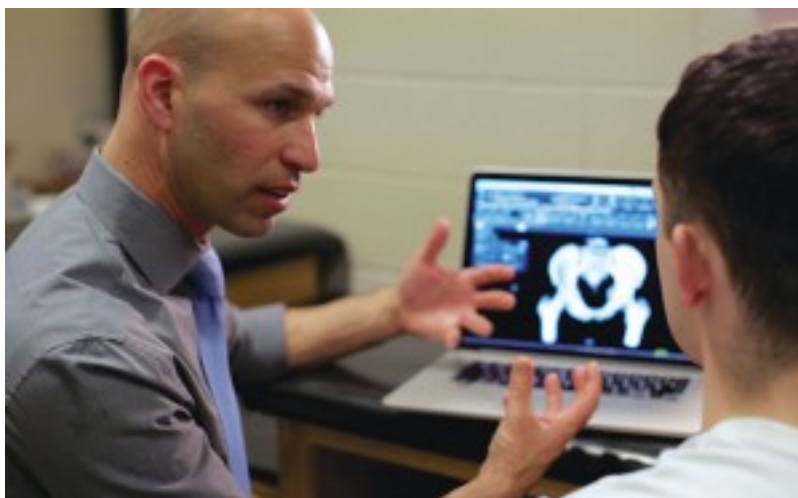




Daredevil Doc

Hip surgeon understands the call of ‘the endless playground’

By Jane Palmer



It takes a special kind of doctor to treat Boulder County’s fitness- and adventure-obsessed sporting community—one who understands athletes’ minds as well as their bodies, one who truly grasps the

drive to push physical boundaries.

No one knows this better than Omer Mei-Dan. As well as being a surgeon at the University of Colorado's Sports Medicine clinic, he has been an extreme-sports athlete for more than 30 years. The desire to push the limits? He's felt that, sometimes daily. The thrill of taking risks? He gets it. The need to enjoy the beautiful outdoors? He understands. The challenge of coming back after serious injury? Been there, done that, multiple times, and he has the scars to prove it.

"I think that everybody has the right to practice the sport that they love and pursue their dreams," says Mei-Dan, 41. "My role as a doctor is to fix them and to make sure they return to their sport safely."

'They Thought We Were Crazy'

Mei-Dan's love of sports began in his home country of Israel, where he grew up on a kibbutz. At age 10, with his younger brother, he started surfing in the Mediterranean. The two had no wetsuits and wore sweatshirts to keep them warm, even in the periodic hailstorms. Their parents, huddled in a car, would watch in disbelief. "They thought we were crazy," Mei-Dan says. "But they trusted our judgment and ability to deal with these unique situations, even in a sport that was practically unknown at that time."

And those adventures were just a start. From surfing, Mei-Dan moved to rock and ice climbing, then downhill mountain biking, skydiving, skiing and snowboarding, free diving, white-water kayaking and eventually BASE jumping and wingsuit flying. A quick Internet search on his name shows a video [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRVeerUPYpc] of him

dangling from an ultralight aircraft 500 feet above the Judean Desert, and then parachuting into a moving pickup truck. Another one shows him leaping from a 984-foot-tall smokestack as a BASE jumper (someone who parachutes off tall objects with only one chute). As a stunt man and a former member of Red Bull's Global BASE-jumping team, he regularly performed such bone-chilling feats around the world.

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“I love the challenge and the intensity,”

Mei-Dan says. “But most of all I love being out there. Being in nature, I absorb the strength and beauty around me. It is an endless playground.”

Defining a New Field

Somewhere along the way Mei-Dan managed to find the time to study orthopedic surgery at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and he brings his own similarly unique approach to sports medicine. In 2012, he established the CU sports medicine Hip Preservation Service, and then dreamed up the idea of holding the world's first extreme sports-medicine conference in Boulder. Doctors, athletes and healthcare professionals from around the globe convened in Boulder this past June to discuss how to treat, and prevent, injuries in extreme-sports athletes.

“My hope with this conference is to define a new field within sports medicine,” says Mei-Dan, who organized the event (including, naturally, some climbing, biking and mountain-running excursions for attendees). “Extreme-sports athletes have unique

needs, both physically and mentally, and we need to learn how to address these properly.”

Mei-Dan moved to Boulder with his wife and three children in 2012, and between surgery, his clinic, extensive research work and starring in a TV show called *Cutting Edge MD* (yes, that too), he still finds the time to enjoy the outdoors. He especially loves the easy access to the mountains, the cliffs, the rivers and the ski slopes. “You can just open your door and start running 20 miles up in the mountains, and if you want to go climbing you just have to walk for five minutes and you are on the crag.”

And that explains why Mei-Dan knows how to treat the sporting community. “It takes one to know one,” he says.

Jane Palmer is a freelance science writer and radio producer. She lives in Eldorado Springs with her husband and their daughter.



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