

Ortho doc takes things to extremes. Like most physicians, recent Sports Medicine Clinic arrival Omer Mei-Dan, MD, spends time in the clinic. Unlike most, he also enjoys hanging hundreds of feet above the earth.



Omer Mei-Dan, MD, extreme athlete, launches Hip Preservation Service

New Sports-Med Surgeon Hangs Out Shingle

By Todd Neff



Omer Mei-Dan, MD, hangs from a powered parachute in Israel, preparing to test a parachute from an altitude of 500 feet. Given the lack of a backup chute, he's not allowed to jump from planes with BASE jumping gear.

Behold Omer Mei-Dan, MD, dangling from an ultralight aircraft, letting go, and then parachuting into the bed of a moving pickup truck. **Watch** him leap from a 984-foot smokestack, drop from a hot-air balloon, plunge from cliffs, backflip from radio towers, and dive off the Eiffel Tower.

Now watch Mei-Dan sitting on a cushioned bench outside the Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion Day Surgery unit, MacBook on his lap, having an animated discussion of his preferred surgical tools and medical devices with a UCH finance person. Observe as he considers the finer points of a hip magnetic resonance imaging scan with Children's Hospital Colorado pediatric hip surgeon Eduardo Novais, MD. There's no YouTube video, but Mei-Dan spent part of last Wednesday doing these things too.

Mei-Dan, 39, the CU Sports Medicine practice's latest addition, brings together what on the surface seem to be two very different passions.

He was a world-class extreme-sport athlete, foremost as a BASE jumper (in which one parachutes off tall objects) sponsored by Red Bull. A 2002 film about him was titled "Cheating Death: Base Jumper." He still dabbles: over the New Year's holiday, he **produced a BASE jump** off Singapore's Marina Bay Sands hotel. But mainly, he's an orthopedic surgeon specializing in hips and extreme-sports injuries (think climbing, kayaking, skiing, parasailing, BASE jumping and the like) though they're not usually the same patients.

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Skydiving, surgery. CU Sports Medicine is no stranger to athletic achievement, and not just among patients. For example, Eric McCarty, MD, was a University of Colorado football standout; Physician Assistant Ashley Chrisman was an NCAA-champion pentathlete; Deborah Saint-Phard, MD, was an Olympic shot-putter, and the list goes on. But Mei-Dan, who arrived on the Front Range in March from Melbourne, Australia, is raising the bar – hundreds of feet, and then jumping off it.

An online chase after “Omer Mei-Dan” digs up tantalizing references to injuries of the sort that beg the question of whether damage to his own body led to his chosen profession. While a football knee injury got McCarty into orthopedics, Mei-Dan’s dad was a pediatrician in Israel, where Mei-Dan grew up on a kibbutz. He was always going to be a doctor, and made up his mind early to become an orthopedic surgeon.



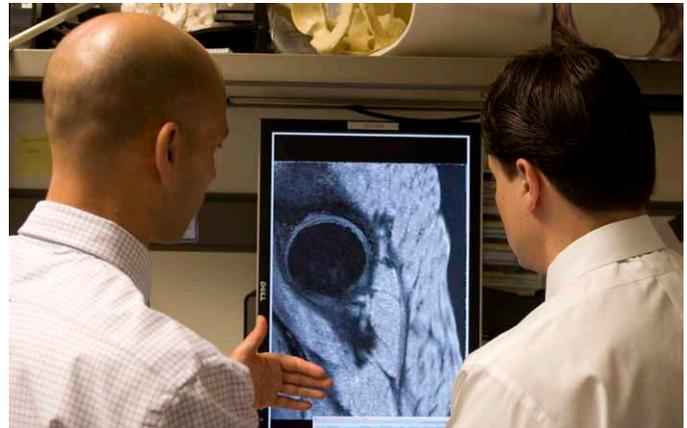
Omer Mei-Dan, MD, talks surgical tools at UCH.

On the other hand, some of his shining moments in BASE jumping came as a mere hobby – and later side business – during medical school, he says.

Mei-Dan’s work with Sports Medicine has two main facets. He’s launching a Hip Preservation Service that will offer treatments ranging from injections to arthroscopy, cartilage regeneration to complex hip-realignment surgeries. Patients who need these kinds of procedures aren’t generally extreme-sports athletes, he says, but they’re often athletes, professional and recreational, whose activity tends to expose them to congenital hip and pelvis issues far earlier than is the case with more sedentary creatures.

Unique view. “He brings an international perspective and experience in the treatment of hip conditions that is unrivaled in the Front Range,” McCarty said. “His experience with extreme sports, both as a physician and participant, is completely unique in the United States and adds an exceptional dimension to CU Sports Medicine.”

Mei-Dan is also continuing his work in treating extreme-sports injuries. Sports medicine specialists come in after the trauma team patches a person up, he says (a tibia fracture from a motorcycle accident can look a lot like one from a partially inflated parachute), with the aim of customizing bodily repairs that help a patient return to activity.



Mei-Dan and Eduardo Novais, MD, discuss a hip MRI at Children’s Hospital Colorado.

For example, Mei-Dan says, one can use a plate or an intramedullary rod to repair a tibia. Either one works, but a skier might be better served with the rod (the ski boot might irritate a superficial plate), while a runner might do better with the shin plate (avoiding anterior knee pain, a common scenario), he explains. He and the Sports Medicine team also help speed a patient’s return to the track, sports field or terrifying ledge.

Research interests. Mei-Dan’s research spans the two fields. He’s published sports medicine research on platelet-rich plasma’s therapeutic effectiveness in helping treat various sports and hip injuries and on the hormonal changes and mental characteristics manifest in extreme-sports athletes. But later this year, he’s publishing the first medical textbook that describes typical extreme-sports injuries, their causes, how to prevent them and how to treat them.

He will also soon join the trauma team.

“I have a major affinity for trauma,” he said, clarifying, “You never know what’s going to come through the door.”

As with other Sports Medicine faculty, Mei-Dan splits his time between clinics and operating rooms in Denver and Boulder.

Outside of work, recent back surgery has kept him from leaping from tall buildings, though he says he’s almost ready to go again.

He's been running the trails of Boulder, where he's settled with his wife and two kids. Mei-Dan maintains a climber's leanness (BASE jumpers generally mountaineer up to their perches), right down to a shaved scalp with stubble interrupted by a two-inch dorsal scar – a reminder of a BASE-jump cliff strike.

As for injuries sustained in extreme sports that have evolved from participatory to academic in focus, Mei-Dan is vague – besides to say that he's sustained his share and learned from them.

"A couple of the rehab protocols I'm using were ones that I built for myself," he says.