

# Tendon Tears Do Not Get Well Enough If Left Alone

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SAN FRANCISCO — A laissez-faire attitude toward a torn rotator cuff tendon in the shoulder or a meniscal tear in the knee is no longer appropriate.

These injuries should be repaired, Dr. Michael F. Dillingham said at the annual meeting on advances in emergency medicine.

Primary care physicians should suspect an acute tear of the rotator cuff tendon in patients with subdeltoid pain and pain on abduction. These patients usually have fallen on the shoulder or outstretched arm, or have had the arm strongly pulled.

A tear may also be associated with a traumatic dislocation of the shoulder, he said.

Note the possibility of a rotator cuff tear when referring the patient. "That's the best you can do," said Dr. Dillingham, the team physician for the San Francisco 49ers football team.

He believes too many orthopedists still leave these injuries untreated, thinking

of suspicion to diagnose and treat properly.

In the prearthroscopy era, the "naive" concept of a "partial" tear of the anterior cruciate ligament resulted in recommendations for injured patients to try the knee, Dr. Dillingham said.

Such recommendations still are made "in the town I work in, all over this state, and all over America by people who are in sports. It's institutionalized in some health care systems as a way to keep people away from subspecialty care." But "it's grossly inappropriate in terms of the long-term health, safety, and benefit of the patient," he said.

When the knee gives out, the meniscus and ligaments are sheared and torn, and bone bruises and traumatic arthritis can occur.

Acute referral is essential to check for such associated injuries, especially meniscal tears. Reconstruction of anterior cruciate ligaments, which used to be emergent, ideally is delayed several weeks to allow inflammation to subside, dramatically reducing the risk of fibrosis.

A torn meniscus, on the other hand, deserves immediate attention. A young patient whose meniscal tear is not prioritized may be doomed to have osteoarthritis, Dr. Dillingham said.

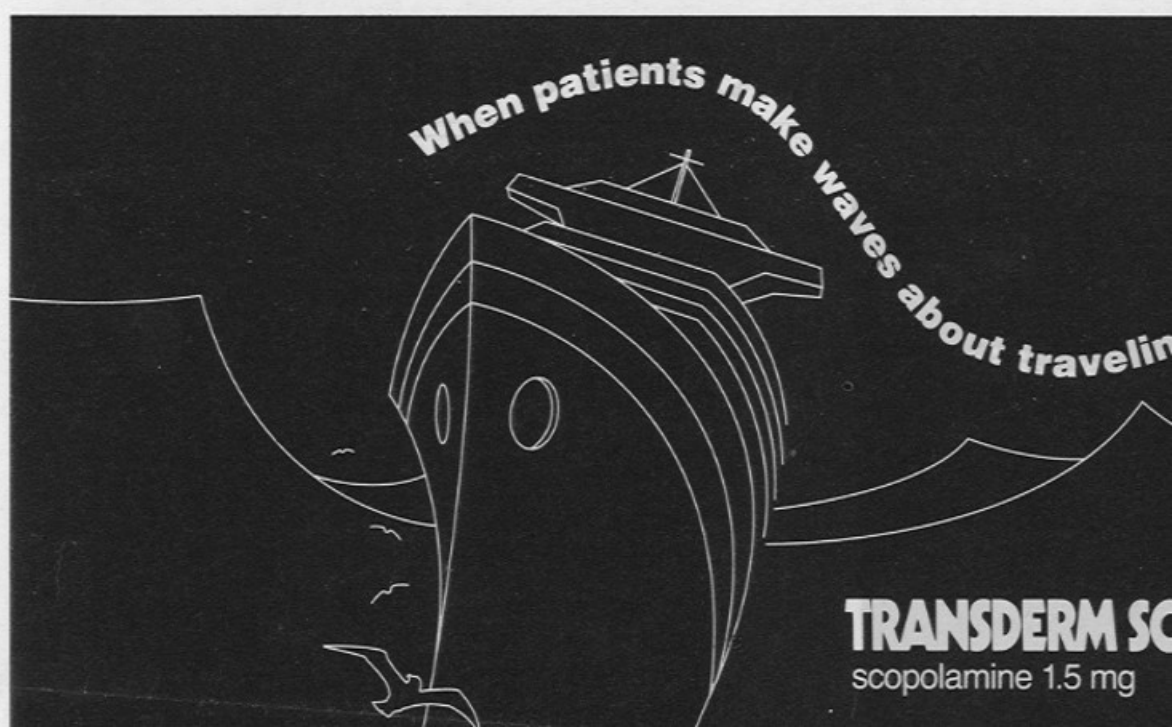
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Seeing some or taking a wa major tissue in me, particularly with potential tears," he said.

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Dr. Dillingham



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