

James A. Nicholas, MD
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Sports medicine today owes much of its spectacular growth to the visionary ideas of James A. Nicholas, MD, the founding director of the Nicholas Institute of Sports Medicine and Athletic Trauma (NISMAT) at Lenox Hill Hospital. In a brilliant medical career spanning over five decades, Dr. Nicholas has not only formulated many of the concepts central to an understanding of the body's reaction to injury, but he has given us an understanding of how the body, as a linkage system, adapts to physical stress imposed by exercise, illness and other conditions.

In 1960, as team physician for the New York Titans, which later became the New York Jets, Dr. Nicholas became interested in the causes and treatment of athletic injuries. Working with athletes convinced him that sports medicine was far more than simply treating a sprain on the football field. How treating elite athletes could translate to real life was foremost on Dr. Nicholas' mind. As a team physician, he treated bone and joint injuries; his goal was to understand their mechanisms as well. Looking beyond the injury itself, Dr. Nicholas sought the causes. Did the athlete have hidden pathology that caused the injury? How did athletic performance affect pathology? From these questions, Dr. Nicholas developed definitions, which are still being used today, of performance factors in sports.

With a knowledge born of careful and meticulous research, tempered with a bit of serendipity, Dr. Nicholas helped formulate the concepts of a new specialty that would integrate sports medicine and science. Through the years, Dr. Nicholas' pioneering studies have borne out the fact that people in all stages of life, from childhood to old age, need physical activity and exercise to maintain health.