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**Post-operative Rehabilitation Protocol**  
**ACL Reconstruction**

**PHASE I: Immediate post-operative (weeks 1- 4)**

Goals:

- Protect graft and graft fixation
- Control inflammation/swelling
- Full AROM as tolerated first 4 weeks
- Educate patient on rehabilitation progression
- Restore normal gait on level surfaces

Weight bearing Status:

- Weight-bearing as tolerated immediately post-op with crutches
- Wean from crutches for ambulation by 2 weeks as patient demonstrates normal gait mechanics and good quad control
- No brace needed

Exercises:

- Patellar mobilization/scar mobilization
- Hamstring curls – add weight as tolerated (for patellar tendon autograft procedure only)
- Heel slides
- Quad sets (consider NMES for poor quad sets)
- Gastroc/Soleus stretching
- Hamstring stretches
- Gastroc/Soleus strengthening
- SLR, all planes. Add weight as tolerated to hip abduction, adduction and extension
- If available, deep-water jogging for ROM and swelling
- Closed Kinetic Chain Quadriceps strengthening activities as tolerated (wall sit, step ups, mini squats, leg press 90-30 degrees)
- Quadriceps isometrics at 60° and 90°
- If available, aquatics for normalizing gait, weight bearing and strengthening
- Balance/Proprioception
- Stationary Bike – initially for promotion of ROM – progress light resistance as tolerated

Criteria for advancement to Phase II:

- Full PROM flexion/extension
- Good quad set, SLR without extension lag
- Minimal swelling/inflammation
- Normal gait on level surfaces

## **PHASE II: Post-operative weeks 4 to 10**

### Goals:

- Restore normal gait with stair climbing
- Maintain full extension, progress toward full flexion range of motion
- Protect graft and graft fixation
- Increase hip, quadriceps, hamstring and calf strength
- Increase proprioception

### Exercises:

- Continue with range of motion/flexibility exercises as appropriate for the patient
- Continue closed kinetic chain strengthening as above, progressing as tolerated – can include one-leg squats, leg press, step ups at increased height, partial lunges, deeper wall sits, lunge walks.
- Stairmaster (begin with short steps, avoid hyperextension)
- Nordic Trac or elliptical machine for conditioning.
- Stationary bike- progress time and resistance as tolerated
- Continue to progress proprioceptive activities for patellar tendon autograft procedures, initiate for hamstring tendon autograft procedures – ball toss, balance beam, mini-tramp balance
- Continue hamstring, gastroc/soleus stretches
- Continue to progress hip, hamstring and calf strengthening as tolerated
- If available, begin running in the pool (waist deep) or on an unweighted treadmill at 8 weeks

### Criteria to advance to Phase III include:

- No patellofemoral pain
- Minimum of 120 degrees of flexion
- Sufficient strength and proprioception to initiate running
- Minimal swelling/inflammation

## **PHASE III: Post-operative weeks 10 to 16**

### Goals:

- Full range of motion
- Improve strength, endurance and proprioception of the lower extremity to prepare for sport activities
- Avoid overstressing the graft
- Protect the patellofemoral joint
- Normal running mechanics
- Strength approximately 70% of the uninvolved lower extremity per isokinetic evaluation (if available)

### Exercises:

- Continue flexibility and ROM exercises as appropriate for patient
- Initiate OKC Knee extensions 90°-30°, progress to eccentrics
- If available, isokinetics (with anti-shear device) – begin with mid-range speeds (120o/sec- 240o/sec)
- **Progress toward full weight bearing running at 12 weeks**
- Begin swimming if desired
- Recommend isokinetic test with anti-shear device at 12 weeks to guide continued strengthening
- Progressive hip, quadriceps, hamstring, calf strengthening
- Cardiovascular/endurance training via Stairmaster, elliptical, bike

- Advance proprioceptive activities

Criteria for advancement to Phase IV:

- No significant swelling/inflammation
- Full, pain-free ROM
- No evidence of patellofemoral joint irritation
- Strength approximately 70% of uninvolved lower extremity per isokinetic evaluation
- Sufficient strength and proprioception to initiate agility activities
- Normal running gait

#### **PHASE IV: Post-operative months 4 through 6**

Goals:

- Symmetric performance of basic and sport specific agility drills
- Single hop and 3 hop tests 85% of uninvolved lower extremity
- Quadriceps and hamstring strength at least 85% of uninvolved lower extremity per isokinetic strength test

Exercises:

- Continue and progress flexibility and strengthening program based on individual needs and deficits
- Initiate plyometric program as appropriate for patient's athletic goals
- Agility progression including, but not limited to:
  - Side steps
  - Crossovers
  - Figure 8 running
  - Shuttle running
  - One leg and two leg jumping
  - Cutting
  - Acceleration/deceleration/sprints
  - Agility ladder drills
  - Continue progression of running distance based on patient needs
  - Initiate sport-specific drills as appropriate for patient
  - Assessment of running on treadmill

Criteria for advancement to Phase V:

- No patellofemoral or soft tissue complaint
- Necessary joint ROM, strength, endurance, and proprioception to safely return to work or athletics

#### **PHASE V: Begins at 6 months post-op**

Goals:

- Safe return to athletics/work
- Maintenance of strength, endurance, proprioception
- Patient education with regards to any possible limitations

Exercises:

- Gradual return to sports participation
- Ok to return to practice with team with gradual reintegration to practice scrimmaging
- Maintenance program for strength, endurance