

## **Rehabilitation plan ACL RECONSTRUCTION**

Rehabilitation after surgery for an ACL tear is a lengthy process. Return to sports and activities takes months. There are many variations of ACL rehabilitation, and the information provided here is simply an overview. Specific rehabilitation must focus on each individual athlete, and you must adhere to your own protocol. It is also important to note that timelines are a guide -- progression depends on completion of one step, before advancing to the next step.

The physiotherapist will give you home exercises - the success of the operation largely depends on how well you comply with the instructions and how hard you work.

### **The First Days:**

#### **Weeks 1-2:**

- Range of motion exercises can begin immediately after surgery. The initial focus is to regain full extension (the ability to fully straighten) of the knee. In general, flexion (ability to bend) is much easier to regain than extension.
- You will work with the physiotherapist to work on gait training (walking), gentle strengthening, and aerobic work.
- You can get on a stationary bicycle as soon as possible after surgery as this improves strength, motion and aerobic activity.
- You can continue with icing (wrap a bag of frozen peas in a thick towel), elevation and pain killers and inflammatory medications if necessary, to control the swelling.

#### **Weeks 3-6:**

- Work is continued with the physiotherapist. As motion increases, emphasis is shifted to strengthening. Specifically, balance and proprioceptive exercises are very important.
- Once normal motion has been achieved, some sport-specific activities can be started. Before beginning these activities, motion must be near normal and the swelling in the knee gone.

#### **Months 4-7:**

- Continued progression with sports specific activities. This phase of rehabilitation is often the most difficult, because you may have a knee that "feels" normal, but is not ready for the stresses of some sport activities.
- Emphasis of rehabilitation should be on sport simulating activities. These will include figure-of-eight drills and plyometrics, and over time will include sport drills. For example, a tennis player may start light hitting, a soccer player some controlled dribbling, etc.

### **Return to sports:**

- Deciding when to return to unrestricted sports activities depends on a number of factors.
- Depending on the type of sport, this is usually possible 6 to 9 months after surgery.
- Most importantly the decision must be based on your progression with physiotherapy.