

**Theodore B. Shybut, MD FAANA FAAOS**  
Southern California Orthopedic Institute  
Knee, Shoulder, Elbow Arthroscopy &  
Reconstructive Surgery  
Van Nuys and Valencia / Santa Clarita, CA  
@shybutMD / [www.shybutmd.com](http://www.shybutmd.com)



## Delayed ACL Reconstruction Protocol

### Tips for Successful Recovery

- 1. Surgical pre-cautions:** Do not change bandages unless instructed by physician. Wear compression hoses on operative limb until crutches are discharged. If you suspect a DVT, contact Dr. Shybut's office immediately at 661-290-5473 or refer to ED immediately. If patient has reactive effusion that does not improve with rest, ice, and compression, contact Dr. Shybut's office.
- 2.** Begin stretching extension ROM on day one. Achieve full extension ROM by week 2. If not achieved by end of week 4, notify the physician's office.
- 3.** Address quad activation early and focus on isolation of quadriceps activation. Use surface emg, NMES, and tactile cueing to isolate quadriceps. Be aware of co-contracting from hamstrings, and ensure proper form. Do not progress to standing activities if patient is unable to achieve isolated quad set in long seated position. Goal is to achieve heel lift with a quad set.  
\*Dosing quad sets: 10 minutes of 10 second squeeze/10 second rest, x5 times a day.
- 4.** Straight leg raises: Ensure quadriceps is activated and is maintaining contraction throughout the SLR range to eliminate extensor lag. Aim for a calf tap and elimination of extensor lag by week 3. Calf tap: the calf taps/skims the table while the heel stays elevated as the leg descends to starting position. Continue doing SLR until 10# ankle weight is achieved.
- 5.** Do not force flexion ROM, but encourage steady progression. Patellar mobility is imperative. Use gentle soft tissue techniques for areas such as anterior interval/fat pad, quadriceps, hamstrings, and scar management. If 90° of flexion is not achieved by week 2, notify physician's office.
- 6.** Start double leg (DL) mini squats and leg press from 0° to 60° initially, then progress to 90° as tolerated. Single leg (SL) activities may be initiated at week 4 with SL leg press and step-ups, then advancing to SL activities as tolerated. Loaded leg extensions are prohibited.

\*Squat progressions example: DL leg press, DL mini squats, DL chair squats, DL body weight squats, SL leg press, SL step ups, Static lunge split squat, SL step downs, SL squats, SL split squat with elevated back leg, walking lunges, SL sit to stands, SL slide outs.

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7. Pre-run/pre-jump program includes tempo-based activities with focus on the deceleration phase such as DL speed squats, DL drop squats, DL “bounce bounce bounce squat”, then progress to alternating SL drop squats. Also, intermittently increase the tempo of regular strengthening exercises to align with the timing requirements of jogging and jumping.
8. Walk/Jog program: MD approval required. Begin on treadmill with 2- 3 days per week. Begin with 1:1 or 2:1 walk to jog ratios, (ie. 1 min walk to 1 min jog or 2 min walk to 1 min jog). Then progress each week by 1 min jog until 12-15 min of jogging is achieved.
9. Plyometric program: MD approval required. Begin with small DL jumps, jump rope, and small depth jump landings& box jumps. Progress box height as skill is mastered. Ensure equal weighted DL take-off and landing before progressing to SL plyometrics. Initiate SL plyometrics with alternating L and R landings in place and then advance to SL hops. Begin a sportsmetric based plyometric program when released by surgeon.
10. Isokinetic protocol: After 20 weeks and with MD approval, may begin training and testing with 300°/sec and progress to 180°/sec. Do not proceed if patient has history of anterior knee pain.
11. Return to Play Progression: a graded re-exposure is essential. Return to non-contact practice, return to contact practice, return to scrimmage, return to interval play, return to full time play.
12. **Prevention of future ACL injury** requires ongoing dedication to correcting functional movement deficits identified during rehabilitation. **FIFA 11+** is an injury prevention program that has demonstrated efficacy. Dr. Shybut recommends athletes, therapists, and trainers utilize this program and incorporate the exercises into their ongoing conditioning.

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## **PHASE 1 - ACUTE (0-6 Weeks)**

**PHASE GOALS: PROTECT GRAFT, RESTORE AMBULATION & ADL STATUS**  
**RANGE OF MOTION\* *NO MENISCUS/CARTILAGE PROCEDURES***

☐ 0-1 Week -- Full extension and progress flexion to 90°

☐ 1+ Weeks – Maintain full extension and gradually progress to full flexion

☐ Patellar mobs, calf/hamstring stretching, heel prop, prone hangs

### **WEIGHT BEARING**

0-2 Weeks -- WBAT

2+ Weeks – FWB with symmetrical gait

### **BRACE & CRUTCH USE**

0-1 Week – Brace locked in 0° extension, unless unlocked by MD

1-2 Weeks – Unlock brace 0° to 60°

2+ Weeks – Brace unlocked to full if good quad control and full extension

2-4 Weeks – D/C crutches when gait is normal

4+ Weeks – D/C brace for home ambulation; continue for community ambulation until MD approval to D/C

### **STRENGTHENING**

Quad sets, straight leg raises, hip abduction

Pre-gait, TKEs, calf raises, static balance, mini squats, chair squats, leg press, step ups, static lunge, HS curls, hip machine, bridges

Stationary biking: must be > 110° knee flexion

### **CRITERIA FOR FULL AMBULATION**

- > 0° KNEE EXTENSION & 90° KNEE FLEXION
- > 30 STRAIGHT LEG RAISES WITHOUT LAG
- MINIMAL EFFUSION, PAIN, & SYMMETRICAL GAIT WITHOUT A LIMP
- MD OR PT APPROVAL

## **PHASE 2 – STRENGTH (6-12 Weeks)**

**PHASE GOALS: IMPROVE STRENGTH AND PROTECT THE GRAFT**

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## **RANGE OF MOTION**

6+ Weeks – Symmetrical & pain free with overpressure

## **STRENGTHENING**

Leg press, step ups, step downs, RDLs, lunges, Bulgarian squats, wall sits

Squat progression: bodyweight squats → single leg squats

Advance hip abduction & glut strength: band walks, lateral lunge, reverse lunge

Core exercises: planks, side planks, v-ups, Russian twist, superman

Balance training: foam pad, balance board, BOSU

## **CONDITIONING**

Initiate dynamic warm-up: frankenstein kicks, leg swings, knee hugs, heel sweeps, heel/toe walks, oil rigs, lateral lunge, hip rotation, inch worm, speed squats

Stationary bike, elliptical, & rowing machine

Swimming: progress kicking gradually and pain-free, no flip turns

## **NO RUNNING or PLYOMETRICS**

### **CRITERIA FOR PHASE 2**

- PAIN LESS THAN 3/10 (WORST)
- WITHIN 2° DEG NORMAL KNEE EXTENSION & 120° KNEE FLEXION
- SYMMETRICAL BODY WEIGHT SQUAT
- MINIMAL EFFUSION, PAIN, & SYMMETRICAL GAIT WITHOUT A LIMP

## **PHASE 3 – INITIATE JOGGING (12-20 Weeks)**

**PHASE GOALS: IMPROVE STRENGTH AND INITIATE JOGGING PROGRAM**

### **RANGE OF MOTION**

12+ Weeks – Maintain symmetry & pain-free with overpressure

### **STRENGTHENING**

Gym strengthening: squats, deadlifts, HS curls

SL strengthening: SL squats, sit to stands, ball slams, step ups/downs

Dynamic core exercises: mountain climbers, planks, pikes, pale off press

Integrate interval strength circuits & work/rest timed intervals

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## **CONDITIONING**

Dynamic warm-up

Biking, elliptical, swimming, & rowing

12+ Weeks -- Treadmill walk/jog progressions: begin with 30"-1' W/J intervals, advance jog time by 1 min each week

16+ Weeks -- Double leg jump rope

Predictable, patterned linear ladder drills

## **CRITERIA FOR JOGGING AND DOUBLE LEG JUMP ROPE**

- **PAIN LESS THAN 3 / 10 (WORST)**
- **WITHIN 2° NORMAL KNEE EXTENSION & 120° KNEE FLEXION**
- **QUADRICEPS & HAMSTRING STRENGTH > 60% NORMAL**
- **LESS THAN 4cm DEFICIT ON SINGLE-LEG SQUAT (ANTERIOR REACH)**
- **AT LEAST 1 MINUTE OF SINGLE LEG SQUATS**
- **MD APPROVAL**

## **PHASE 4 – STRENGTH, DOUBLE LEG PLYOMETRIC, AND INITIATE AGILITY (20-32 Weeks)**

**PHASE GOALS: INTRODUCE DYNAMIC MOVEMENTS  
RANGE OF MOTION**

20+ Weeks – Maintain symmetry & pain-free with overpressure

### **STRENGTHENING**

Gym strengthening: squats, deadlifts, initiate olympic lifting

SL strengthening: SL squats, sit to stands, ball slams, step ups/downs

Interval strength circuits & work/rest timed intervals

Dynamic eccentric loading: double & single leg

Dynamic core: rotational and anti-rotational drills

## **CONDITIONING**

Dynamic warm-up

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Biking, elliptical, jogging, swimming, & rowing

Advance to track jogging: jog straights & walk curves

### **PLYOMETRICS & AGILITY:**

Double leg plyos: jump rope, shuttle jumps, line jumps, cone jumps, depth jumps, box jumps

Predictable, patterned ladder drills or footworkS

### **CRITERIA FOR AGILITY & DOUBLE LEG PLYOMETRIC: >24 WEEKS**

- **PAIN LESS THAN 2 / 10 (WORST)**
- **QUAD & HAM STRENGTH > 80% NORMAL; > 50% H/Q RATIO FOR FEMALES**
- **AT LEAST 3 MINUTES OF SINGLE LEG SQUATS (RESISTED)**
- **JOGGING >15 MINUTES ON TRACK OR PAVED SURFACE**
- **< 5 ON LANDING ERROR SCORING SYSTEM (LESS)**
- **MD APPROVAL**

## **PHASE 5 – STRENGTH, AGILITY, POWER & PLYOMETRICS (32-36 Weeks)**

### **PHASE GOALS: INITIATE POWER MOVEMENTS & SINGLE LEG PLYOMETRICS RANGE OF MOTION**

32+ Weeks – Maintain symmetry & pain-free overpressure

### **STRENGTHENING**

Gym strengthening: squats, deadlifts, olympic lifting

Interval strength circuits & work/rest timed intervals

Dynamic eccentric loading: double & single leg

Dynamic core: rotational and anti-rotational drills

Isokinetic training protocols: begin with 300°/sec, progress to 180°/sec

### **CONDITIONING**

Dynamic warm-up & integrate sports specific warm up

Biking, elliptical, jogging, swimming & rowing

### **PLYOMETRICS & AGILITY**

Double leg: cone jumps, box jumps, tuck jumps, squat jumps

Single leg: hops, bounding, SL hop for distance, triple hop

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Linear speed drills & sprint drills

Change of direction drills: begin with < 90°, progress to 90° and greater

Introduce unpredictable agility movements

Non-contact sports specific drills

**CRITERIA FOR SINGLE LEG PLYOMETRICS: >32 WEEKS  
PAIN LESS THAN 2 / 10 (WORST)**

**QUAD & HAM STRENGTH > 80% NORMAL; > 50% H/Q RATIO FOR FEMALES**

**< 5 ON LANDING ERROR SCORING SYSTEM (LESS)  
MD OR PT APPROVAL**

## **PHASE 6 - RETURN TO PLAY (36+ Weeks)**

**PHASE GOALS: SPORTS SPECIFIC MOVEMENTS & RETURN TO PRACTICE  
STRENGTHENING**

Gym strengthening: squats, deadlifts, and olympic lifting

Interval strength circuits & work/rest timed intervals

Dynamic strength and core exercises

Complex movement patterns

Isokinetic protocols: 300°, 180°, and 60°/sec

### **CONDITIONING**

Jogging, biking, swimming, rowing, & interval sprint workouts

### **PLYOMETRICS & AGILITY (2-3 DAYS/WEEK)**

Max effort DL and SL jumps → progress with rotation

Lateral & rotational agility drills

Unpredictable cutting agility

Non contract drills → contact drills with MD approval

**Return to practice → return to contact practice → return to scrimmage → return  
to interval play → return to full play**

### **CRITERIA FOR RETURN TO PLAY**

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- **PAIN LESS THAN 2 / 10 (WORST)**
- **> 75/100 ON ACL-RSI SURVEY**
- **QUAD & HAM STRENGTH > 90% NORMAL; > 60% H/Q RATIO FOR FEMALES**
- **90% NORMAL ON SINGLE-LEG HOP TESTS**
- **95% NORMAL FIGURE OF 8, 5-10-5 PRO-AGILITY, & S-L VERTICAL JUMP**
- **MD APPROVAL**