

Functional Rehabilitation of Sports Injuries – Table 3

Table 3: The three major phases of functional rehabilitation

Acute phase: May last from 24 hours post-injury to approximately one week. Ends when symptoms have subsided enough for athlete to tolerate basic non-athletic activities.

- Focus on protection of injured tissue, minimizing pain, minimizing inflammation
- Early physical therapy with gentle and conservative maneuvers can be initiated
- Early, complete, accurate diagnosis during this time is essential

Intermediate phase: Begins when acute symptoms have improved and athlete is able to tolerate non-athletic activities

- Focus is placed on slow, graded advancements in strength, flexibility, endurance
- Precautions such as aggressive stretching may need to be implemented
- Rehabilitative activities may be largely directed at particular simple physical measures, rather than sport-specific functional tasks
- Modifiable elements potentially contributing to injury should be addressed (i.e., incorrect biomechanics, antagonist muscle group imbalances, inflexibility, poor proprioception)
- Optimizing kinetic chain should begin in this phase

Sport phase: A critical period, which begins following return of normal strength, flexibility, and other basic performance parameters

- Focus is placed on developing functional movement patterns through sport-specific drills and integrated training
- Continue to emphasize corrective strategies
- Caution against the belief that the athlete is ready for full competition as athlete continues to be at risk of reinjury at this point