

ACL Rehabilitation Milestones Checklist

Criteria-based progression from early rehab to performance

R2P — Rehab. Recover. Perform.

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How to Use This Checklist

This document outlines key ACL rehabilitation milestones. These milestones are not timelines. Progression should be based on readiness, movement quality, and tolerance — not dates.

MILESTONE 1 — CRUTCH REMOVAL

Goal: Independent, confident walking without compensation

- Full knee extension with controlled stance
- Minimal to no joint effusion
- Able to weight-bear without pain escalation
- Normal gait pattern without limping
- Good quadriceps activation during stance

MILESTONE 2 — RETURN TO RUNNING

Goal: Tolerance to repetitive impact with control

- No reactive swelling after walking or low-level plyometrics
- Adequate quadriceps strength for bodyweight load
- Controlled single-leg squat and landing
- Pain-free brisk walking and jogging drills
- Confidence loading the involved limb

MILESTONE 3 — RETURN TO TRAINING

Goal: Structured sport-specific preparation

- Tolerates linear running volumes
- Introduced change of direction drills
- Strength symmetry approaching $\geq 85-90\%$
- Maintains movement quality under fatigue
- Recovers well between sessions

MILESTONE 4 — RETURN TO SPORT (PLAY)

Goal: Safe participation with controlled exposure

- No reactive swelling after training
- Quadriceps strength $\geq 90\%$ symmetry
- Controlled deceleration and cutting
- Psychological readiness to participate
- Load progression plan in place

MILESTONE 5 — RETURN TO PERFORMANCE

Goal: Consistent expression of sport-specific performance

- Quadriceps strength ≥ 95 –100% symmetry
- Speed, power, and agility restored
- Reactive and unplanned movement tolerance
- Confidence without conscious knee monitoring
- Sustained performance across weeks

Long-Term Perspective

ACL rehabilitation does not truly end. It evolves into ongoing performance and injury prevention work. The strongest athletes are those who continue to manage load, strength, and recovery long after return.

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