

COMPREHENSIVE PHYSICAL THERAPY

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Sports Medicine/Foot & Ankle

Return to Swimming Program

Performance Pearls

1. Full pain-free range of motion and at least 90% strength is needed to begin the program.
2. Athletes must stay consistent with level 4 core strengthening during return to swimming training.
3. Patients will continue to see small incremental improvements in range of motion, strength and endurance for several months following return to swimming. It's imperative that athletes continue with their foundational rotator cuff and scapular strengthening program to avoid setbacks. Following the program 2 to 3 times per week is needed to promote ongoing progress.
4. The dynamic pre-activity warm-up is an essential element in the program to properly prepare the shoulder complex for load. The patient should perform the following dynamic warm-up before practice or meets:
 - Strength
1x10 serratus punch or scapular push-up's, T's, ER/IR 0°, ER 90°
 - Stretch
2x30 seconds cross-arm, pec/wall, triceps and thumb up back
5. Once an athlete is cleared to begin swimming it will typically take 6 to 12 weeks to build up to full training distance/capacity. Achieving optimal performance levels may take additional time beyond that point.
6. Do not increase training volume until the athlete completes 1 to 2 sessions at a given distance with good tolerance. Fatigue and some tightness are acceptable during a swim set; pain should be non-existent. Soreness that lasts 24 hours or less is normal and part of the reconditioning process. If symptoms last greater than 24 hours, push back the next swimming session another day or until pain resolves. Reduce subsequent training session distance as needed.
7. Recovery is essential for success; begin return to swimming interval programming every other day with consistent use of ice following practice. Use NSAIDs as needed to control inflammation.
8. This 12 week return to swimming program can be accelerated for non-operative patients. Use sound clinical judgment to add volume, intensity and strokes at an accelerated rate.
9. Patients with knee problems will be instructed when to re-introduce the breast stroke.
10. Patients with spine/low back pathology will be instructed when to slowly phase breast and fly into their program.

Phase 1 - Loading principles

- 3 times per week program performed in 25-yard or 50-meter pools
- Stroke allocation: 50 to 60% free and 40 to 50% back and breast (except knee and spine patients, until cleared).
- Additional volume may be added by kicking with arms at the side or with kick board as long as it does not provoke symptoms. Kickboard should be held close to the chest and not in the stream-line position.

Week 1:

- Day 1: 500 yards total distance broken into sets of 25 to 50 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 600 to 700 yards total distance broken into sets of 25 to 50 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 750 yards total distance broken into sets of 25-50 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 2:

- Day 1: 750 yards total distance broken into sets of 25 to 50 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: dry land – core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 750 to 1,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 25 to 100 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest

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- Day 5: 1,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 25 to 100 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 3:

- Day 1: 1,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 100 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 1,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 150 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 1,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 150 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 4:

- Day 1: 2,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 200 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 2,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 200 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 2,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 250 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 5:

- Day 1: 3,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 250 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: dry land – core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 3,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 250 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 3,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 250 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 6:

- Day 1: 3,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 400 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 2: Dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 3,500 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 400 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 4,000 yards total distance broken into sets of 50 to 400 yards/meters with full recovery between each set.
- Day 6: dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 7: complete rest

Phase 2 - Loading principles

- May add a 4th practice with shorter distance week 7 to 9
- May add a 5th practice with shorter distance week 10 to 12
- % time with each stroke will be determined based on specialty, current progress and discretion of the physician, therapist and coach.

Week 7:

- All strokes



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- Day 1: 4,000 yards total distance
- Day 2: 2,500 yard light recovery swim; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 4,500 yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 4,500 yards total distance
- Day 6: dry land – core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 8:

- All strokes
- Day 1: 5,000 yards total distance
- Day 2: 3,000 yard light recovery swim; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 5,000 yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 5,000 yards total distance
- Day 6: dry land –core and lower extremity strength
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 9:

- All strokes
- Day 1: 5,500 yards total distance
- Day 2: 3,000 yard light recovery swim; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 5,500 yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 5,500 yards total distance
- Day 6: dry land –core and lower extremity strength
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 10:

- All strokes
- Day 1: 6,000 yards total distance
- Day 2: 3,500 yard light recovery swim; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 5,500 yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 5,500 yards total distance
- Day 6: 2,500 yards total distance; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 7: complete rest

Week 11:

- All strokes
- Day 1: 6,000 yards total distance
- Day 2: 4,000 yard light recovery swim; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 6,000 yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 6,000 yards total distance
- Day 6: 3,000 yards total distance; dry land – rotator cuff, core and lower extremity strength
- Day 7: complete rest



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Week 12: All Strokes

- Day 1: 6,000+ yards total distance
- Day 2: 4,000+ yard light recovery swim; dry land – core and lower extremity strength
- Day 3: 6,000+ yards total distance
- Day 4: complete rest
- Day 5: 6,000+ yards total distance
- Day 6: 3,000+ yards total distance; dry land – core and lower extremity training
- Day 7: complete rest

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