

POST-OPERATIVE REHABILITATION PROTOCOL

Ankle and Syndesmosis ORIF

William McLaughlin, MD | Sports Medicine Surgery | Advanced Bone & Joint

Phase 1 | 0-2 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Protect the fixation in posterior splint.
- Maintain strict non-weight bearing with crutches.
- No scooter use.

Immobilization & Weight Bearing

- Postoperative posterior splint.
- NWB with crutch use, no scooter use.

Phase 2 | 2-4 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Maintain NWB status on operative extremity.
- Continue general strengthening of the LE, UE, and core.
- Begin ankle ROM (dorsiflexion, partial plantar flexion).
- Initiate submaximal isometric ankle and intrinsic foot strengthening.

Weight Bearing

- NWB operative extremity.

Treatment

- Gait training.
- Continue general strengthening of the LE, UE, and core as indicated.
- Begin ankle ROM, no resistance bands: dorsiflexion, 75% max plantar flexion (avoid full PF).
- Avoid passive inversion and eversion.
- Begin ankle strengthening: submaximal isometrics in all directions, no resistance bands.
- Intrinsic foot strengthening.

Phase 3 | 4-8 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Achieve full weight bearing in walking boot (weeks 5-6).
- Wean out of boot and into shoe with Velocity Ankle Brace (weeks 6-8).
- Progress ankle strength, ROM, and proprioception out of brace.
- Restore normal gait pattern.

Weight Bearing & Bracing

- Weeks 5-6: full weight bearing in walking boot.
- May sleep without boot at week 6.
- Weeks 6-8: wean out of boot and into shoe with Velocity Ankle Brace.

Treatment

- Normal gait patterning/training.
- Progress to full AROM in all directions.
- 4-way resisted ankle.
- Add LE closed-chain exercises, single plane.
- Evaluate LE biomechanics, flexibility, and strength bilaterally.
- Introduce proprioceptive exercises on even ground only — no BAPS, BOSU, or wobble board.

Phase 4 | 8-12 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Restore full functional ROM of the ankle.
- Introduce step up/down progression.
- Demonstrate fair static and dynamic neuromuscular control.

Treatment

- Progress closed-chain exercises.
- Introduce step up/down progression.
- Progress proprioceptive training — static and dynamic balance progressing to varied surfaces as tolerated.

Phase 5 | 12-16 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Transition from Velocity brace to traditional lace-up ankle brace.
- Demonstrate full strength throughout full ROM.
- Demonstrate fully restored static and dynamic neuromuscular control and kinesthetic awareness.
- Progress out of lace-up ankle brace by week 16.

Bracing

- Transition from Velocity Ankle Brace to traditional lace-up ankle brace.
- Progress out of lace-up ankle brace at week 16.

Treatment

- Begin high-impact activity.
- Progress to plyometric program including dynamic, multiplanar exercises.
- Increase intensity and resistance in closed-chain activities.
- Sport-specific drills.
- Multiplanar movements.
- Complete functional test before four-month follow-up visit with physician.

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression is patient-specific and at the discretion of William McLaughlin, MD.