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Non-Operative MCL Rehabilitation Protocol

NOTE: The below program may be accelerated for first degree MCL sprains or may be extended depending on the severity of the injury. The below schedules are just guidelines. If there is any increase in pain or swelling or loss of ROM, these can serve as signs that the progression of the patient may be too rapid.

PHASE I, (Maximal Protection Phase)

Goals:

- Early protected ROM
- Prevent quadriceps atrophy
- Decrease effusion/pain
- Immediate post-injury

Day 1:

- Ice, compression, and elevation
- Hinged knee brace or immobilizer if needed
- Crutches weight bearing as tolerated
- PROM/AAROM to maintain ROM
- Isometric quadricep sets, flexion SLR's

Day 2:

- Continue above
- SLR's (flexion and abduction)
- Hamstring sets
- Whirlpool for ROM (cold for first 3-4 days, then warm)

Days 3-7:

- Continue as above
- Brace worn at night, brace at day as needed
- Crutches WBAT
- ROM as tolerated
- Eccentric quad work
- Bicycle for ROM stimulus
- Multi-angle isometrics
- Mini-squats and light leg press

PHASE II, (Moderate Protection Phase)

Criteria for progression:

- No increase in instability
- No increase in swelling
- Minimal tenderness
- PROM 10-100

Goals:

- Full painless ROM
- Restore strength
- Ambulation without crutches

Days 8-10:

- Discontinue crutches if can walk without limp
- Continue ROM exercises (progress to full ROM exercises)
- Continue strengthening program with PRE's (emphasize quadriceps, medial hamstrings and hip abduction)
- Continue multi-angle isometrics
- Closed-chain strengthening (shuttle, leg press, mini-squats, step-ups, etc)
- Stationary cycling
- Water exercises, running forward/backward
- Flexibility exercises (hamstring, quadriceps, iliotibial band, gastrocnemius)

Days 11-14:

- Continue as week 2
- Initiate isokinetics, sub-maximal progressing to maximal with fast contractile velocities
- Begin running program if full painless extension and flexion are present

PHASE III, (Minimal Protection Phase)

Criteria for progression:

- No instability
- No swelling/tenderness
- Full painless ROM

Goals:

- Increase strength and power

Week 3:

- Continue strengthening program (emphasis on fast speed isokinetics, eccentric quadriceps, hip abduction, medial hamstrings)
- Isokinetic test
- Proprioception training
- Endurance exercises
- Cross training (cycling, nordic track, stairmaster, swimming)
- Initiate agility program, sport-specific activities (do not progress if pain, limp or undue fatigue)

PHASE IV, (Maintenance Phase)

Weeks 4-8:

- Continue isotonic/isokinetic strengthening exercises
- Continue flexibility exercises
- Continue proprioceptive activities
- Continue sport specific/agility/running drills
- Return to competition:
 - When approved by physician
 - Full ROM
 - No tenderness over MCL
 - No instability
 - No effusion
 - Muscle strength 85% of contralateral side
 - Proprioceptive ability satisfactory
 - Lateral knee brace (if necessary)