

# AC Joint Reconstruction

Rehab Protocol  
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## PHASE 1: Generally 0-6 Weeks Post-Op

**GOALS:**

- 1) Protect surgical repair
- 2) Avoid a “stiff” shoulder
- 3) Restore ROM
- 4) Pain Control and edema reduction

**PRECAUTIONS:**

**NO** lifting greater than 1-2 lbs for 6 weeks  
**NO** jogging/running  
**NO** internal rotation behind back and horizontal abduction

| Week       | Forward Flexion | ER in Scaption | IR In Scaption | Abduction |
|------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| Week 1-2   | ≤45°            | ≤60°           | ≤60°           | ≤45°      |
| Week 2-8   | ≤90°            |                |                | ≤90°      |
| Week 9-10  | ≤120°           | Full           | Full           | ≤120°     |
| Week 10-12 | Full            | Full           | Full           | Full      |

**SLING/IMMOBILIZER:**

Sling/Immobilizer must be worn (even during sleep) except during rehabilitation  
 Sling/Immobilizer continues for 6-8 weeks, as prescribed by your surgeon

**WOUND:**

Bandage/dressing to stay on for 48 hours after surgery  
 May begin showering after post-op day #2 (no need to cover incision site)  
**Do NOT** submerge shoulder in tub or pool for 4 weeks  
 Suture/staple removal @ 10-14 days post-op, per Ortho/PT

**CRYOTHERAPY:**

Cold with compression/elevation (e.g CryoCuff, ice with compression wrap)

- Every hour for 15 minutes for the first 24 hours, until acute inflammation is controlled
- After acute inflammation is controlled: 3x per day for 15 minutes, or longer as tolerated

**REHABILITATION:**

Frequent use of CryoCuff and/or ice with extremity elevated  
 Begin scar massage after incision site sloughs/scar is formed  
 Begin the following exercises

~ Days 1-7

Hand squeeze exercises  
 Elbow and wrist AROM with shoulder in neutral at side  
 Supported pendulum exercises

~ Weeks 1-2

AAROM supine with wand  
 Gentle shoulder shrugs/scapular retraction without resistance  
 1-2 finger isometrics x 6 internal/external rotation at neutral  
 Stationary bike wearing sling  
 Pendulum exercises  
 Treadmill: progressive walking program

~ Weeks 2-6

Prone scapular stabilization/strengthening

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
|                                  | Rhythmic Stabilization<br>Biceps and supine triceps PREs with light weight<br>Elliptical trainer with <b>LEs only</b>           |
| <b>FOLLOW-UP:</b>                | Supervised rehabilitation: 2-3x per week<br>PT re-evaluation: monthly<br>Orthopedic re-evaluation: 2 & 6 weeks post-operatively |
| <b>CRITERIA FOR PROGRESSION:</b> | ROM: no significant pain within the ROM limits  |

**PHASE 2: Generally 6-12 Weeks Post-Op**

| <b>GOALS:</b>                    | 1) ROM: full shoulder flexion and internal rotation; ~90% full ER<br>2) Minimize pain and swelling<br>3) Pain free ADLs   |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|----------|-------|------|------|-------|-----------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>PRECAUTIONS:</b>              | <b>NO</b> repetitive overhead shoulder use<br><b>NO</b> pushups, heavy lifting, or other sports participation<br>Avoid reaching behind back<br><br><table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Week</th> <th>Forward Flexion</th> <th>ER in Scaption</th> <th>IR in Scaption</th> <th>Abduction</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Week 6-9</td> <td>≤120°</td> <td>Full</td> <td>Full</td> <td>≤120°</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week 9-12</td> <td>Full</td> <td>Full</td> <td>Full</td> <td>Full</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Week           | Forward Flexion | ER in Scaption | IR in Scaption | Abduction | Week 6-9 | ≤120° | Full | Full | ≤120° | Week 9-12 | Full | Full | Full | Full |
| Week                             | Forward Flexion   | ER in Scaption | IR in Scaption  | Abduction      |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| Week 6-9                         | ≤120°   | Full           | Full            | ≤120°          |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| Week 9-12                        | Full  | Full           | Full            | Full           |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CRYOTHERAPY:</b>              | Cold with compression/elevation (e.g CryoCuff, ice with compression wrap)   |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| <b>REHABILITATION:</b>           | Continue Phase I exercises as needed<br>Progress the exercises and increase intensity gradually when patient is ready.<br><b>DO NOT</b> increase if shoulder pain and/or stiffness remains from prior exercise session  |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| ~ Weeks 6-8                      | Shoulder AAROM and AROM<br>Light theraband exercises<br>- ER and IR w/ pillow/towel under arm<br>- Flexion, extension, abduction, scaption to 60 degrees<br>Standing rows with theraband<br>UBE forwards and backwards at low resistance<br>Prone scapular retraction (light weight)<br>Ball on wall (arcs, alphabet)<br>BAPS on hands<br>Stairmaster<br>Pool walking/running – <b>NO</b> UE resistive exercises  |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| ~ Weeks 9-12                     | AROM, AAROM, PROM/mobilizations as needed to regain full motion<br>Ball toss with arm at side<br>Pool therapy – with UE resistance  |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| <b>FOLLOW-UP:</b>                | Supervised rehabilitation: 2-3x per week<br>PT re-evaluation: monthly<br>Orthopedic re-evaluation: 3-4 months post-operatively  |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CRITERIA FOR PROGRESSION:</b> | ROM: no significant pain within the rehab limits  |                |                 |                |                |           |          |       |      |      |       |           |      |      |      |      |

**PHASE 3: Generally 3-6 Months Post-Op**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>GOALS:</b> | 1) Pushups at own pace without pain<br>2) 90% internal/external rotation strength return |
|---------------|--|

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
|                        | 3) Run 2 miles at easy pace   |
| <b>PRECAUTIONS:</b>    | <b>NO</b> participation in contact/collision sports or military schools until 6-9 months post op  |
| <b>REHABILITATION:</b> | Continue Phase II exercises as needed<br>Progress to the following exercises and increase intensity gradually when patient is ready.  |
| ~ Months 3-4           | Begin Push-up progression – wall to table<br>Ball toss overhead<br>Fitter on hands<br>Weight training with light weight<br>Treadmill – running progression program  |
| ~ Months 4-6           | Push-ups-continue progression<br>Sit-ups<br>Swimming<br>Running progression<br>TRX, battling ropes, C2 rowing ergometer, etc<br>Quadruped activities (bear crawls, ladder drills)<br>Progressive weight training program<br>Transition to home/gym program<br>Introduce plyometric exercises (rebounder throws with arm at side, wall dribbles overhead, rebounder throwing with weighted ball etc) |
| <b>FOLLOW-UP:</b>      | Supervised rehabilitation: 2-3x per week<br>PT re-evaluation: monthly<br>Orthopedic re-evaluation: 3 & 6 months post-operatively  |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS:</b>  | After 6 months postop: Exercises in Phase III are continued, gradually increasing intensity and duration as tolerated.<br>It is recommended to wait until 12 months post-op to return to contact/collision sports or aggressive military training. This time period may be adjusted slightly by the surgeon and therapist according to patient progress.  |

These guidelines were created as a framework for the post-operative rehabilitation program. They DO NOT substitute for any specific restrictions or requirements that are determined through the necessary shared decision-making and collaboration between the operating surgeon and treating rehabilitation team.