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RETURN TO ALPINE SKIING

Goal: To get you back on the slopes having fun and enjoying the fresh air. And by the way, you'll be rehabilitating your knee.

Process: I will now attempt to slay the mythic beast of skiing and knee injuries: For more than a decade, I have allowed my experienced skiers to return to skiing as soon as they have the muscle control to do so. Actually, I do not let them ski, I let them *rehabilitate their knee on their skis*. This includes my TKR and ACL reconstruction patients who can get on skis as early as 6 weeks post-op if:

- ✓ They are experienced skiers
- ✓ They have full motion and good muscles
- ✓ There are good snow conditions
- ✓ They follow the program below
- ✓ They have someone skiing with them to both watch out for potential danger and criticize their technique. As I have said before, returning from injury is a great time to eliminate bad habits but most of us need some coaching to do so.

In twenty years of practice, I have yet to experience a skier tearing his or her graft on the slopes in the first six months post ACL surgery. The same for TKR patients. Good skiers do not injure their knee in controlled skiing. They injure their knee in aggressive race situations or in recreational skiing when they are not paying attention. This does not mean you cannot re-injure your knee on the slopes, but in the controlled rehab period you are more apt to re-injure your knee on an icy parking lot than on the ski slopes (just be careful when walking to the lodge!). The key is to be strong and alphabetical: A to B to C.

You can perform each Level of the "Return to Skiing" program 3-4 days per week alternating with "soft workouts" on the other days. You probably need to spend 2 weeks to perfect your technique at each Level (though it may seem painfully slow, this is not the time to rush). If you have pain or swelling: RICE, and back down one level until the swelling resolves.

LEVEL A:

PURPOSE	Balance and coordination. Return of “snow confidence.”	
PROTOCOL	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity</p> Warm-up on the bike or take a brisk walk. Take 6 runs on short skis and flat terrain (controlled speed, low intensity). DO NOT ski 2 days in a row!	<p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Total = 90 min</p>
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up to ski, don't ski to warm up. • Rent a pair of short skis for the first weeks of skiing since at slow speeds short skis are easier to turn and less stressful on the knee. • Ski only on flat terrain (green) for the first 2 outings but avoid the carnage of the bunny slope. • Cool down in a pool if possible. Stretch and ice. 	

LEVEL B:

PURPOSE	Feeling the inside edge. Technical skills.	
PROTOCOL	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity</p> Warm-up on the bike or take a brisk walk. Take 8-10 runs on well-groomed trails. Your choice of skis. DO NOT ski 2 days in a row!	<p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Total= Up to 3 hours</p>
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the speed down and work the technical aspects of skiing (balance, stance, hands forward, etc.). • This is “on-snow REHAB”. You must concentrate on every movement. Also, you must continue your programs of exercise and aerobic training. • If you're a racer your coach needs to be involved at this stage. If you're not a racer, now is a great time to take a lesson. • Cool down, stretch, and ice. 	

LEVEL C:

PURPOSE	Balance, strength and endurance	
PROTOCOL	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity</p> <p>Warm-up on the bike or take a brisk walk.</p> <p>Take 10-15 runs on firm, groomed trails.</p> <p>You can now ski the blue trails or the smooth black trails if you are an expert skier.</p> <p>Racers: A gate training progression needs to be established with your coach.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Total = Up to 4.5 hours</p>
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always take it easy on the first 2-3 runs. • Speeds should be natural and completely under control. • Turn frequently to work on technique, improve strength, and keep your speed under control. • STOP skiing before you are fatigued. Take breaks, hydrate and beware of deteriorating conditions and flat light. • Avoid unpredictable conditions for the first year post-op (e.g. heavy wet snow, woods skiing, moguls, fog, etc.). • Have you gotten that lesson yet? • As always: cool down (in the pool if possible), stretch, and ice. 	

Return to Competition:

While it's an easy decision letting someone on the slopes to rehab for the first time, getting back to competition is a bit tougher. Unlike softball, you cannot titrate your effort in a ski race. Gravity dictates your speed and the ruts dictate the difficulty. That said, this is one of those plans that must be made with the opinion of your coach, your knee and your doctor. Once you've made the decision to race, you have to fully commit. When doing your race imagery you should feel strong and excited-- not nervous about crashing. If you have those thoughts, you might need a few more weeks of training.