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The Interval Running Program

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When baseball pitchers return to throwing after an injury or surgery they undertake an "Interval Throwing Program." This Interval Running Program is designed to help with the transition from knee strain, stress fracture, ankle sprain, calf strains/achilles tendonitis, and other lower extremity injury or surgery. The principles are simple and they can be adapted individually based on the nature of the specific injury. Above all, it's important to understand that giving your lower extremities time to transition back to running is critical. If one rushes to get back to their desired level of activity, they run a serious risk of sustaining a recurrent injury which keeps them out of their desired sport for a potentially unnecessarily longer period of time.

Phase I: Typically 3-4 weeks

Exercise bike for 30-45 minutes every other day at low resistance progressively increasing each week. 15-20 minutes of focused stretching with specific attention to hamstrings and calf/runner's stretches.

Phase II: Typically 3-4 weeks

Elliptical trainer at low resistance for 15-20 minutes on the intervening days when not riding the bike. 15-20 minutes of focused stretching with specific attention to hamstrings and calf/runner's stretches.

Phase III: Typically ~4 weeks

Jog-walking for 20-30 minutes every other day as follows:

Prior to each workout - 10 minutes of focused stretching with specific attention to hamstring and calf/runner's stretches.

WEEK 1: 1 minute of jogging followed by 4 minutes of walking, repeat 4-6 times. Do this every other day. Stretch for 10 minutes afterward and then ride a bike, swim, or use the elliptical on the intervening days for 45-60 minutes.

WEEK 2: 2 minutes of jogging followed by 3 minutes of walking, repeat 4-6 times. Do this every other day. Stretch for 10 minutes afterward and then ride a bike, swim, or use the elliptical on the intervening days for 45-60 minutes.

WEEK 3: 3 minutes of jogging followed by 2 minutes of walking, repeat 4-6 times. Do this every other day. Stretch for 10 minutes afterward and then ride a bike, swim, or use the elliptical on the intervening days for 45-60 minutes.

WEEK 4: 4 minutes of jogging followed by 1 minute of walking, repeat 4-6 times. Do this every other day. Stretch for 10 minutes afterward and then ride a bike, swim, or use the elliptical on the intervening days for 45-60 minutes.

Phase IV:

At this point you should be running 30 minutes every other day and can now begin to increase pace and duration of run but should continue to do so gradually for an additional 3-4 weeks and try to avoid running on back-to-back days. Several MRI studies have quantified the stress on knee cartilage from running on back-to-back days that affects the resiliency of cartilage at a molecular level. In addition, it's often better for your muscles and joints to rest and sufficiently recover from a run while doing a separate lower-impact exercise that emphasizes other muscle groups.

Please note that there will be times when this interval running program may feel slow and tedious. We would like to emphasize that it can be modified but, as a set of core principles, we have seen tremendous success in its ability to get patients back to what they love to do. At certain time points, if pain and soreness becomes significant then we recommend dialing back the intensity of your current phase for 5-7 days and then resuming as tolerated.

