

Recovery Timelines

What to Expect

1 Why Timelines Are Approximate — Not Exact

Recovery estimates draw on evidence and clinical experience, but no two bodies heal identically — factors like age, injury severity, sleep, nutrition, and rehabilitation adherence all influence your timeline. Fully healed means two things: functional recovery (returning to activity without significant pain) and structural healing (tissue remodelling, which can continue for months after you feel well again).

2 Typical Recovery Timelines by Injury Type

The table below reflects research evidence and clinical guidelines for common foot, ankle, and lower limb injuries, assuming consistent rehabilitation adherence.

Injury / Condition	Typical Range	Key Notes
Muscle strain (mild–moderate)	2–8 wks	Grade I resolves in 2–4 wks; Grade II takes 4–8 wks. Full strength return, not just pain reduction, marks recovery.
Ankle sprain (Grade I–II)	2–8 wks	Grade I: ~2–3 wks. Grade II: 4–8 wks. Proprioception restoration is the last and most important step.
Patellofemoral pain (knee)	6–16 wks	Most improve within 6–12 wks. Higher-demand return may take several months; hip and calf strength are key.
Tibial stress reaction / fracture	6–16 wks	Low-grade reactions: 6–8 wks. True stress fractures: 12–16 wks before impact is appropriate.
Metatarsal stress fracture	6–16 wks	2nd/3rd: ~6–8 wks with offloading. 5th metatarsal: up to 16 wks; surgical fixation sometimes needed.
Plantar fasciitis / heel pain	3–12 mths	Significant improvement within 3–6 mths of consistent management; full resolution can take up to 12 mths.
Achilles tendinopathy	3–6 mths+	Tendons respond slowly but reliably to progressive loading. Chronic cases often require 3–6 mths or longer.

Injury / Condition	Typical Range	Key Notes
Lateral ankle reconstruction (post-op)	4–6 mths	Full weight-bearing over weeks 6–8, then phased rehab. Low-impact activity ~3 mths; sport from 4–6 mths.

3 The Recovery Curve

Recovery follows a steep early climb, a flatter plateau, then gradual continuation — with occasional flare-up dips that are normal and do not erase progress.

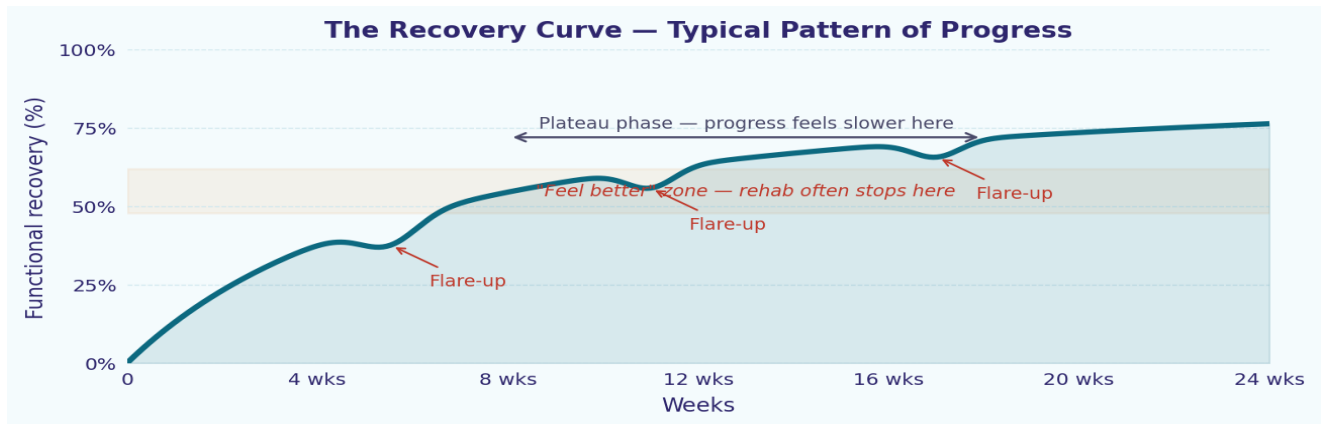


Figure 1 — Typical musculoskeletal recovery shape. Flare-ups are a normal part of the process.

4 Milestones to Aim For

Milestone	What it looks like	Typical timing
Pain settles within 24 hrs of activity	Tissue is tolerating load and recovering between sessions	Early–mid rehab
Walking without limp; exercises without pain spike	Baseline function restored; ready to progress load and intensity	Mid rehab (4–8 wks)
Return to sport or sustained high-impact activity	Tissue load capacity at or near pre-injury level — pain-free through full range	Late rehab (injury-dependent)

5 Red Flags & Key Takeaways

- Sudden large increase in pain or swelling, especially after a specific incident
- Night pain waking you from sleep, or pain at rest — warrants prompt assessment
- Numbness, tingling, or pins and needles — may indicate nerve involvement
- No improvement after 6–8 weeks of consistently following your rehab programme

Key message 1: Timelines are guides, not guarantees

Biology, severity, and adherence all shape your recovery. Use timeframes as a rough map, not a deadline.

Key message 2: Pain reducing is not the same as being healed

Tissue remodelling continues long after pain settles. Completing your full programme protects you from re-injury.