

Returning to Sport or Hobbies

A Safe and Structured Approach to Getting Back to What You Love

1 When Are You Ready to Return?

Return to sport or hobbies is not just about pain levels — it is about tissue capacity, movement quality, strength, and confidence. These factors together determine whether your body can safely handle the demands of your activity.

- Returning too soon is one of the most common causes of re-injury.
- Your clinician will assess multiple criteria — not pain alone — before clearing you for full return.

Pain-free does not mean ready. Tissues can still be in the early stages of remodelling long after pain has resolved — loading them beyond their capacity at this point risks re-injury.

2 The Return-to-Activity Continuum

Recovery follows a structured progression. Each stage has specific goals and criteria that must be met before advancing to the next.

Stage	Focus	Criteria to Progress
Stage 1 — Protection	Rest from aggravating activities; maintain general fitness	Pain settling; no new symptoms with daily activities
Stage 2 — Rehabilitation	Restore strength, flexibility, and movement quality	Full range of motion; 70–80% strength vs. unaffected side
Stage 3 — Return to Training	Sport/hobby-specific training at reduced intensity	Able to complete sport-specific movements pain-free
Stage 4 — Return to Full Activity	Full participation at pre-injury level	Psychological readiness; no compensatory movements

3 Key Milestones Before Return

Clearing these milestones gives you and your clinician confidence that your body is genuinely ready — not just symptom-free.

Milestone	Why It Matters	How It Is Assessed
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Adequate strength	Weak muscles cannot protect joints and tendons from sport loads	Single-leg tests; hop tests; clinical assessment
Full pain-free range of motion	Restricted movement causes compensations that load other structures	Comparison to unaffected side or normal values
Movement confidence	Fear of re-injury impairs performance and increases injury risk	Ability to perform sport movements without hesitation
Cardiovascular fitness	Fatigue increases injury risk — fitness must match activity demands	Return should be gradual even when tissues are ready

4 A Graduated Return Plan

Even when all milestones are cleared, a gradual return reduces the risk of overload. Use the following framework as a guide — your clinician may adjust timelines based on your individual progress.

Week	Activity Level	What to Monitor
Week 1	25–50% normal training volume; no competition	Pain response; fatigue; any new symptoms
Week 2–3	50–75% volume; introduce sport-specific drills	Soreness settles within 24 hours; no worsening
Week 4+	75–100%; return to full participation	Full sessions tolerated; confidence high; no avoidance patterns

5 Key Takeaways

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

Return to sport is a process, not an event. There is no single moment when you are 'fixed'. Recovery is a structured continuum — each stage builds on the last. Rushing any step increases the risk of setback. Trust the process, hit your milestones, and progress will follow.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2

Pain-free is not the same as ready. Tissues continue to remodel and strengthen long after pain resolves. Strength, movement quality, and psychological readiness all matter as much as symptom levels. Let your clinician guide the decision — not just how you feel on a good day.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

A graduated return protects your long-term participation. Starting at 25–50% volume and building gradually keeps load within your tissue capacity, gives your body time to adapt, and dramatically reduces re-injury risk. A few extra weeks of patience now protects months — or years — of future participation.