ACL Reconstruction Guideline

This rehabilitation program is designed to return the individual to their activities as quickly and safely as possible. It has been developed for rehabilitation following ACL reconstruction performed with an arthroscopic approach. Modifications to the protocol may be necessary dependent on graft type, primary reconstruction versus ACL revision, or concomitant injuries or procedures performed. This evidence-based ACL rehabilitation protocol is criterion-based and timeframes in each phase will vary depending on many factors including patient demographics, goals, and individual progress. This guideline is designed to progress the individual through rehabilitation to a transition to full sport participation. The therapist must modify the program appropriately depending on the individual’s goals for activity following reconstruction.

This guideline is intended to provide the treating clinician with a guideline for rehabilitation. Clinicians should continue to make sound clinical decisions regarding the patient’s post-operative care based on exam/treatment findings, individual progress, and/or the presence of post-operative complications. If the clinician should have questions regarding post-operative progression, they should contact the referring physician.

General Guidelines/Expectations

- Therapist will monitor pain and swelling and adjust program appropriately.
- Full hyperextension with heel propped equal to the other side at 2 weeks.
- Full flexion equal to other side in 6-8 weeks.
- Post-operative drop lock knee brace used for the first 6 weeks, unlocked for walking when patient can complete a SLR with no extension lag for 20 repetitions.
- Weight bearing will begin immediately unless restricted by concomitant procedure.
- If available and per physician approval, Blood Flow Restriction (BFR) training can begin after suture removal and progress along with recommendations. Please refer to the BFR guideline for more detailed information.
- Progression into functional activities and resisted knee extension will be slower with an Allograft.
- Level 1 testing (see appendix) at or near 4 months post op.
  - No impact activities until full ROM, no swelling, adequate strength, and biomechanics are demonstrated.
  - Progression to running program at 4 months based on Level 1 testing, physician preference, and demonstrating adequate symmetry and shock absorption with running mechanics and plyometrics
- Depending on patient progress and physician preference, selective midterm testing can be completed in between Level 1 and Level 2 tests. This can consist of any number of the items from Level 2 testing.
- Level 2 testing (see appendix) at 7+ months post-op
  - Return to full sport activities when able to complete Level 2 testing with sufficient biomechanics, strength, balance and confidence. (See guideline and appendix for more specific information).
  - The purpose of the Level 2 test is to determine any areas the patient may need to improve on to ensure a safe return to sport.
  - Adequate testing scores will result in beginning a graduated return to sport or activity consistent with the patient’s goals and safety in mind.
- May initiate open kinetic chain knee extension strengthening exercises at 4 weeks post-op from 90 degrees-45 degrees progressing knee extension ROM 10 degrees/week until performing full ROM. Caution against excessive resistance for first 12 weeks post-op to prevent graft elongation.
# ACL Rehabilitation Guideline (6-12 months depending on patient goals and progress)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Suggested Interventions</th>
<th>Goals/ Milestones for Progression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 0</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Patient Education</strong></td>
<td>Discuss: Anatomy, existing pathology, post-op rehab schedule, bracing, and expected progressions.</td>
<td><strong>Goals of Phase:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-operative Phase</strong></td>
<td>Pre-operative: test contralateral isokinetic strength at 60 &amp; 300°/sec, introduce to blood flow restriction training</td>
<td>1. Regain close to normal joint mechanics and gait mechanics.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruct on Pre-op exercises:</td>
<td>2. Reduce fear going into surgery.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quad setting</td>
<td>Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Straight leg raises</td>
<td>1. No pain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Heel slides</td>
<td>2. No swelling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Towel calf stretching</td>
<td>3. Normalized gait</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Immediate Post-Operative instructions:</strong></td>
<td>4. Normalized ROM</td>
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<td>Use ice and medication as instructed</td>
<td>5. Great quad activation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quad setting every hour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Heel propped to tolerance every 3 hours</td>
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## Phase I

### Maximum Protection Phase

**Weeks 0-3**

**Expected visits: 6-9**

**Specific Instructions:**
- Weight bearing in locked brace (full extension), unlocked with excellent quad control
- Crutches for the first 7-14 days as needed

**Suggested Treatments:**
- Modalities as indicated: Edema controlling treatments
- NMES for quad activation

**ROM:**
- Full extension with heel propped equal to the other side at 2 weeks
- Flexion ROM to 90° by 7-10 days, 110° by 3 weeks

**Manual Therapy:** Patellar mobilizations, focused on superior glide

**Exercise Examples:**
- Quad set, straight leg raise, isometric quad set at 60° with strap
- Towel calf stretch, static knee extension stretch
- Seated PROM knee flexion, wall slide, towel heel slide
- Prone and standing hamstring curls in available ROM (BTB/QT/allograft)
- Clamshells, SL hip abduction, calf raises
- Initiation of blood flow restriction training if applicable

**Other Activities:**
- Recumbent bike, upright bike when ROM allows, no resistance, using strobe glasses, or other vision challenges with balance exercises

**Goals of Phase:**
1. Prevention of post-operative complications
2. Reducing fear with regaining ROM.

**Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:**
1. Control of post-operative pain (0-2/10 with ADL’s in brace)
2. Restoration of full extension (compared to contralateral side)
3. PROM 0-110°
4. Independent SLR without brace with no extension lag
5. Normal walking with brace unlocked
| Phase II | Specific Instructions:  
- Continue with previous exercise program  
- Progress to light CKC program with good knee control  
- Continue with drop lock brace use at all times  
Suggested Treatments:  
- Modalities as indicated: Edema controlling treatments  
- NMES for quad activation  
ROM:  
- Continue to reinforce full extension  
- Progressive flexion as tolerated  
Manual Therapy:  
- Continue with Patellar mobilizations as indicated  
Exercise Examples:  
- HS stretching  
- Leg extensions 90-45 (see general guidelines)  
- 4-8 inch eccentric step ups  
- Mini squats to table, wall sits, band walks  
- HS isometrics, AROM hamstring at 4 weeks  
- DL or SL leg press to tolerance, eccentrics  
- Proprioceptive progressions  
Goals of Phase:  
1. Prevention of arthrofibrosis through ROM program  
2. Reduction of post-operative swelling and inflammation (zero to trace effusion)  
3. Re-education and initiation of quad control with easy CKC exercises  
Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:  
1. Symmetrical hyperextension to 130°+ degrees flexion  
2. Normal walking with brace unlocked  
3. Good knee control and symmetry with CKC exercises  
Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:  
| Phase III | Specific Instructions:  
- Reorganize home program to address current deficiencies  
- Weight training program on their own 1-2 times per week  
Suggested Treatments:  
- ROM: Progress to full flexion ROM (kneeling), progress strength training  
Exercise Examples:  
Week 6  
- Initiation of resisted hamstring curls, progressing as tolerated  
- Single leg calf raises  
- Leg extensions 90-45 with slow increase in ROM (see general guidelines)  
- Plank progressions  
- Leg press progressions  
- Eccentric focused program  
- Goblet squat  
- Offset squats (biased for surgical side)  
- DB eccentric step ups (forward and lateral)  
- Lateral step downs  
- Standing fire hydrant holds  
- Single leg squats  
- Higher level proprioceptive progressions  
Week 10-12  
- Reorganize home program to address current deficiencies  
- Front/back squat  
- Lunge progressions (all directions)  
- Progress weight with previous exercises  
- Leg extensions 90-0 (see general guidelines)  
Goals of Phase:  
1. Improve muscular strength and endurance  
2. Improve cardiovascular endurance and conditioning  
3. Reduce fear and improve confidence in the limb  
Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:  
1. Full pain free active and passive ROM.  
2. Quad and HS 75% at 60°/sec  
3. Single leg step down with good form with no compensatory movements  
4. Back squat 70% body weight with no compensatory movements  
Criteria to Advance to Next Phase:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Rehabilitation Phase</th>
<th>Weeks 3-6</th>
<th>Expected visits: 6-9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controlled Ambulation and Strengthening Phase</td>
<td>Weeks 6-16</td>
<td>Expected visits: 10-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>Specific Instructions:</td>
<td>Goals of Phase:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Strengthening and Power Phase</td>
<td>-Reorganize home program to address current deficiencies</td>
<td>1. Improve muscular strength, power, and endurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 16-24+</td>
<td><strong>Suggested Treatments:</strong> Depending on specific demands of the patient’s goal for an activity level: Continued single leg strengthening as needed. More advanced strength and power lifts. 3-4 sets of 2-8 reps for strength (heavy weight, 2-3 min rest) 3-4 sets of 8-15 reps for hypertrophy (moderate weight, 45-60 sec rest) 3-4 sets of 1-5 reps for power (lighter weight, 5-10 min rest)</td>
<td>2. Improve cardiovascular endurance and conditioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected visits: 8-16</td>
<td><strong>Exercise Examples:</strong> -Continue progression of strength training -Dead lift, RDL, etc. -Progress into power development (pulling derivatives) -Clean pull, snatch pull, high pull, jump shrug, etc.</td>
<td>3. Reduce fear and improve confidence in the limb</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase V</th>
<th>Specific Instructions:</th>
<th>Criteria for Beginning Phase V Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Movement Phase</td>
<td>-Reorganize home program to address current deficiencies</td>
<td>1. 75% strength in quad, HS, gluteals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks: 16+</td>
<td><strong>Suggested Treatments:</strong> Depending on specific demands of the patient’s goal for an activity level: Interval Distance Running Program (appendix); Interval Intensity Running Program (appendix), Plyometric Progressions (appendix), Movement Retraining Progressions (appendix)</td>
<td>2. Limb symmetry index of 90% or greater on functional hop tests and Y balance tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Visits: 8-24</td>
<td><strong>Exercise Examples: sport specific</strong> -Initiate double limb jump training</td>
<td>3. 40/50 on biomechanical functional assessment tests (if performed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Initiate running program (specific to sport)</td>
<td>4. No pain or complaints of instability with functional progression of sport specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Initiate deceleration and single leg hopping</td>
<td>5. &gt;90% on outcome measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Initiate agility (floor ladder and cone drills)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2 Test (8+ month)- see appendix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Progression of functional activities performed only as pain and proper biomechanics allow. Emphasis should be on proper shock absorption and control of dynamic valgus stress at knee (hip medial rotation with knee valgus) with each task performed. Progression to single limb based tasks (deceleration, hopping, and cutting) should not be performed until double limb activities have been mastered. Activities that require dynamic control of rotational stress at the knee (cutting, multiple plane lunges/jumps/hops) are performed only after sagittal and frontal plane control is achieved. Return to sport may occur at any time during this stage per physician clearance and goal achievement.
Appendix

This is a list of objective measures that will be tested during the Level 1 and Level 2 tests at their respective times post-operatively. Please use this information to prepare your patient for formal testing. Portions of the test may need to be re-assessed prior to clearance by the physician if there are significant deficits.

Level 1 Test (4 months) Components:

ACL-RSI Outcome Measure
Mid-range isometric hip abduction strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each: 05 holds :10 rest
Mid-range isometric hip extension strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each: 05 holds :10 rest
90 degree prone hamstring isometrics 3 reps each :05 holds :10 rest
Functional Movements with Video Analysis (all performed on both limbs)
  • 8” forward step down
  • 18” drop jump
  • Lateral shuffle 2x5 yards
Single Leg Squat Test
  • 60 bpm metronome (1 up, 1 down)
  • Thigh parallel in sitting (18-21” height box or table works for most)
  • No touching foot during reps
  • Count reps to fatigue
Single Leg Calf Raise Test
  • 60 bpm metronome (1 up, 1 down)
  • Count reps to fatigue
  • To max height – use standiometer if possible
90° isometric quadricep strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each :05 holds :10 rest
Isokinetics (use clinical judgement on preferred speeds)
  • 60°/sec 2x5 reps :30 rest, 300°/sec x20 reps
    OR
  • 120°/sec 2x5 reps :30 rest, 240°/sec x20 reps

Midterm Testing (in between Level 1 and Level 2 Testing)
  • Depending on patient progress and physician preference, selective midterm testing can be completed in between Level 1 and Level 2 tests. This can consist of any number of the items from Level 2 testing.
Level 2 Test (8+ month) Components:
- The purpose of the Level 2 test is to determine any areas the patient may need to improve on to ensure a safe return to sport.
- Adequate testing scores (generally within 10% of the other side for most tests) will result in beginning a graduated return to sport or activity consistent with the patient’s goals and safety in mind.

ACL-RSI Outcome Measure
Mid-range isometric hip abduction strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each: 05 holds :10 rest
Mid-range isometric hip extension strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each: 05 holds :10 rest
90 degree prone hamstring isometrics 3 reps each :05 holds :10 rest

Functional Movements with Video Analysis (all performed on both limbs)
- 8” forward step down
- 18” drop jump
- Lateral shuffle 2x5 yards
- Decelerations x2
- 90° cut
- Triple hop (90% of average triple hop distance)

90° isometric quadricep strength testing bilaterally 3 reps each :05 holds :10 rest

Single Leg Squat Test
- 60 bpm metronome (1 up, 1 down)
- Thigh parallel in sitting (18-21” height box or table works for most)
- No touching foot during reps
- Count reps to fatigue

Single Leg Calf Raise Test
- 60 bpm metronome (1 up, 1 down)
- Count reps to fatigue
- To max height – use standiometer if possible

Single leg vertical – average of 2 trials for height

Single leg hop for distance 3 repetitions each side
- Measure from the heel, MUST stick the landing for a full 2 seconds
- Normalize and compare to leg length (greater trochanter to the lateral malleolus)
  - Distance jumped divided by leg length
- 5 trials – average the best three or take the best one and compare side to side
- Looking to be within 10% of opposite side

Medial triple hop for distance
- Measure from the lateral foot, MUST stick the landing for a full 2 seconds
- 5 trials – average the best three or take the best one and compare side to side
- Looking to be within 10% of opposite side

Lateral hop testing – tape lines 40 cm apart, number of successful side-to-side hops on single leg in 30 seconds
- (touching the tape does not count)

Isokinetics (use clinical judgement on preferred speeds)
- 60°/sec 2x5 reps :30 rest, 300°/sec x20 reps

Compare isokinetic results to pre-surgery values on uninvolved side to insure return to normal strength.
Return to Running Program

**Guidelines**
- Running program is completed in addition to rehab program and other cardiovascular exercise.
- A dynamic warmup and 3-5 minute walk should precede each run.
- Run only every other day (increase rest days as needed).
- If pain is not sharp, is present during warmup but improves with running, or does not increase as you run, you may continue run and stay at that level until pain free.
- Each level should be completed 3x without pain prior to moving on to next level; repeat sequence as needed.
- If pain increases as you run, creates soreness that disrupts sleep or rest after run, causes swelling, or alters mechanics, stop running and take next day off.
- Consult with your physical therapist throughout return to running process for individualized recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Run</th>
<th>Walk</th>
<th>Reps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>1 ___________</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>1_______</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>1_________</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<td>Level 4</td>
<td>1__________</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<td>Level 5</td>
<td>1__________</td>
<td>7 minutes</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>1__________</td>
<td>1 mile</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>1__________</td>
<td>1 mile → walk → ½ mile</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 8</td>
<td>1__________</td>
<td>1.5 mile</td>
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<td>2 ___________</td>
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<td>3 ___________</td>
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**Interval Sprinting/Running Program**

**Guidelines**
- ✓ Increase total distance by 10% per workout
- ✓ To be complete with no pain and or swelling
- ✓ Repeat 3 times at same distance with no swelling or pain prior to 10% increase

Stage I: Purpose: build up work capacity and improve technique

1. 5 x 20 yds or 5 x ¾ court
2. 4 x 50 yds or 4 x 2 full court
3. 5 x 40 yds or 5 x 1 ½ court
4. 2 x 50 yds or 2 x full court
5. 1 x 100 yds or 1 x 3 courts

1:3 Work:Rest Ratio

INTENSITY 50%

Stage II: Purpose: work on increased speed and build intensity

1. 5 x 20 yds or 5 x ¾ court (63 feet)
2. 4 x 50 yds or 4 x 2 full court (168 feet)
3. 5 x 40 yds or 5 x 1 ½ court (63 feet)
4. 2 x 50 yds or 2 x full court (168 feet)
5. 1 x 100 yds or 1 x 3 courts (252 feet)

1:5 Work:Rest Ratio

INTENSITY 75%

Stage III: Purpose is to build into max speed with bias towards sports specific speed/distance and metabolic demands

These sprint intervals are based on the needs of the individual patient and the demands of their sport(s). Number of repetitions determined by energy demands of specific sport and position.

Work:Rest Ratio or based on sports specific demands: 1:5

INTENSITY 90-100%
Plyometric Progressions

Guidelines
✓ Must be able to perform full, free-weight squat 1.5-2.5 times body weight or squat 60% of body weight five times in five seconds.\(^8\)
✓ Add to sessions 1-2x/week – 3 days between sessions.
✓ Begin with 30-40 foot contacts per session and increase as able.
✓ No more than 80-120 foot contacts per session.

Step 1
• Jumping TO box (decreased landing forces)
  • 2 legs to 2 legs
  • 2 legs to 1 leg
  • 1 leg to opposite leg
  • 1 leg to same leg

Step 2
• Jumping FROM box
  • Landing on 2

Step 3
• Squat jumps
  • 1 leg jump → 2 leg land
  • 2 leg jump → 1 leg land
  • Split squat jumps → scissor jumps
  • 1 leg jump → opposite leg land
  • 1 leg jump → same leg land

Step 4
• Progress to various planes of movement as able.
  • Double leg broad jumps, single leg lateral hops, skater lateral jumps, bounding, drop jumps to jumps over hurdles forward or lateral, etc.
Movement Retraining Progressions

**Guidelines**

- Single skill blocked practice
- Single skill variable practice
- Combination of multiple skills in blocked practice
- Combination of multiple skills in variable practice
- Combination of multiple skills with reactive cueing
- Use sport specific work:rest ratios

- Excellent lateral lunge at multiple speeds → lateral shuffle cone drills
  - Progressing to reactive drills

- Excellent forward and reverse lunge at multiple speeds → decelerations
  - 3 step walking deceleration cone drill
  - Jogging deceleration drills, increasing speed as able
  - Reactive deceleration drills

- Excellent lateral shuffle and deceleration at multiple speeds → cutting
  - Shallow cuts jogging (45 degrees)
  - Deceleration to lateral shuffle cone drills, increasing speed as able
  - Deceleration to 90 degrees cuts, increasing speed as able
  - Reactive cutting drills

- Excellent lateral shuffle, deceleration, cutting, and jumping
  - Reactive, variable, combined drills
    - Utilize strobe glasses, resistance cords, cones, sport specifics, varied surfaces, perturbations

REFERENCES:
