

Hi, friends! I'm still documenting my experiences before surgery, which is the topic of this post.

I'm writing this to hopefully help others set realistic expectations and think about pre-op /post-op planning, but the guidance of a physical therapist for *your particular needs and injuries* is still needed, since not every case presents the same way. Again, this is not a recipe for everyone's healing, just an overview of mine. In case you didn't get to see my 1st post on this topic, I tore my ACL, lateral meniscus and medial meniscus.

Immediately after my injury, my goals were to:

1. Keep swelling and pain down
2. Stay safe, as far as walking and stairs (aka "do not fall!")
3. Maintain or improve my knee range of motion (bending & straightening)
4. Maintain or improve my knee, ankle and hip strength

This can be considered pre-habilitation, or pre-hab for short.

It's noteworthy that I wasn't able to see an orthopedic surgeon for an initial consultation for a few weeks post-injury, and then my surgery was scheduled for weeks thereafter. So, it was up to me to try to get myself in the best position possible in the next few weeks, to help me have the best surgical outcome as far as factors within my control.

To address my goal of keeping swelling & pain at a minimum, I regularly iced and elevated my knee for about 20 minutes. While my knee was higher than my heart during this, I also performed ankle pumps to help flush the additional fluid out of my leg. Fortunately, my pain was not much, so no pain meds or anti-inflammatories were needed!

Instability was my main complaint, particularly if I stepped sideways and pushed off my left leg, or rolled in bed under a heavy blanket. I may have yelped once or twice while getting in the truck or grabbing something from the top shelf at Safeway. So, I obtained an immobilizing knee brace, crutches and a cane. A former patient lent me their knee brace, and the other items were obtained from the Quota Club, a medical equipment loan closet in Estes Park. Many communities have this helpful type of resource, where you give them a deposit and return the equipment when you're done using it.

As far as walking went, I used crutches initially, to offload my left leg for a bit. As I began to feel somewhat better, I progressed to a cane, and bore increasingly more weight on my left leg. I also decreased the use of my immobilizing brace. Stability improved over time, which I suspect was due to my medial collateral ligament (MCL) healing. My MRI showed either a sprain of the MCL or a low-grade tear. By the time I saw my surgeon, Dr. Jonathan Bravman at CU Sports Medicine, his examination revealed good stability as far as the MCL was concerned. However, he was waiting for the surgery to make a final judgment on this.

Regarding maintaining and/or improving my range of motion, my exercises included heel prop and seated knee flexion. For the heel prop I rested my heel on the arm of my couch, or multiple pillows, or a chair, while trying to relax and let gravity pull my knee into a more straight position.

I began with staying in this position for just 1 minute and worked my way up to 10 minutes at a time.



Heel Prop

Intermittently, when I was sitting upright, I would bend my knee as far as I could without increasing my pain too much, then I'd scoot my bottom forward and hold this position for a minute or so. This is the seated knee flexion exercise I mentioned.



Seated Knee Flexion

I also wanted to maintain my strength, and the regimen I used for this included quad sets, straight leg raises, seated march, short arc quads (SAQ), long arc quads (LAQ), sit to stands, hamstring curls and riding the stationary bike. Quad sets, SAQ and LAQs strengthen the quadricep muscles on the front of the hip, thigh and knee. Quad sets & SAQ also help to specifically activate the vastus medialis obliquus (VMO), one of the quads, which is responsible for actively straightening the knee fully. In addition to the heel prop and seated knee flexion above, I feel these were some of the most beneficial exercises for my injury and upcoming surgery.



Quad set



Short Arc Quad

So, my injury occurred on July 4th, and surgery was scheduled for August 15th! My eagerness to get to that next phase was palpable. My future posts will be on the next side of this journey!