Calf Strain Rehabilitation Guidelines

Calf injuries are one of the most common forms of soft tissue injury experienced in sports involving sprinting and rapid changes of direction. Tendon problems often arise as a result of prolonged overuse, fatigue and lack of conditioning in endurance-based activities such as long distance running. They have a high rate of recurrence, often due to inadequate rehabilitation and an early return to sport. The largest risk factor for ongoing calf issues is a history of previous injury.

The calf muscle complex is made up the gastrocnemius (superficial) and soleus (deep) muscles that span between the knee and the heel. These muscles are attached to the calcaneus (heel bone) via the Achilles tendon. Their primary function is to help propel the lower limb forward as the foot pushes off during walking and running.

The guidelines and exercises described below are some of the more basic and effective strategies utilised to restore normal calf muscle function following injury – your physiotherapist will discuss with you any specific adaptations, progressions and precautions that have been tailored to your individual presentation. Any acute injury should be assessed by your physiotherapist prior to starting a rehabilitation program.

Early Phase Rehabilitation

1) RICE – 48-72 hours depending on injury severity
   - Rest – avoid aggravating activities such as heat, alcohol, running, massage (no HARM)
   - Ice – apply for 20 minutes every 2 hours
   - Compression – utilise a firm compressive garment over the affected limb (Skins or a compressive bandage such as tubigrip are appropriate)
   - Elevation – raise affected limb above level of heart (place on a pillow when lying down)

2) Static Calf Stretch
   - Stand facing a wall and adopt a split stance position
   - Keep both heels on the ground and lean forward to feel a stretch through the rear calf
   - Perform this stretch with a straight and slightly bent back leg to target the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles
   - Hold stretch for 30 seconds
   - Do not push into pain

Client: ___________________________  Initial Consult: ___________________________
3) Heel Raises
   o Feet shoulder width apart
   o Slowly raise onto balls of feet, focusing on calf contraction
   o Your therapist will guide you through the pyramid progression as appropriate for your injury

4) Balance
   o Focus on maintaining ankle stability when completing balance tasks
   o When completing hopping tasks aim to land with soft knees and avoid whole body weight shift
   o Your therapist will guide you through the pyramid progression as appropriate for your injury
   o Star excursion
     • Placing one foot on the cross in the middle of the star
     • Keeping your balance, aim to touch as far as you can in front of you with your other foot and then return back to the start.