

Cross Training Around Lower Body Injuries

Sean Mulvaney, MD and Britta Svensson, DPT, CMTPT

General Concepts: The guiding principles for cross-training around your injury during your recovery include: 1) avoid specific activities that caused you pain before your treatment until you are fully recovered, 2) as you progress, proceed gradually and test each new movement or exercise. Remaining active produces a better healing environment than remaining sedentary. The idea is to stay fit while not impairing the ongoing healing. Start any exercise gradually and at first use them only every other day for the first 2 weeks to see how it effects your injury site. As you get farther along in the healing process you may be able to slowly add exercises that you would not have tolerated initially. (see the rehabilitation sheet for your injury).

1. **Pool:** You may swim laps with a pull buoy. This is a small piece of shaped foam that you place between your legs so your legs float behind you as you swim. Try removing the pull buoy and adding easy flutter kicking to see if this bothers your injury. No breast stroke kick during your recovery. Do not do flip turns or push off the wall between laps. Using a floatation belt, you may also do deep-water running if tolerated.
2. **Resistance Training:** Some suggestions include: upper body machines that are able to be used in the seated position and some body-weight exercises such as pull ups, push-ups and planks.
3. **Upper Body Bike:** This is a specialized piece of equipment available in some gyms and physical therapy offices. You sit down, grab the handles and “peddle” with your upper body.
4. **Stationary Bike:** It is critical to properly adjust the seat height. An improperly adjusted seat height can exacerbate any lower body injury. Your knee should be almost fully straight at the bottom of the peddle stroke. If using an upright stationary bike, you should have an upright. Do not pedal while standing (up and off of the saddle). If using a **recumbent stationary bike** properly adjust the seat length. Gradually increase time and intensity if your injury site allows.

As you get further along in your healing process (around 2-4 months) you may consider adding:

Walking: This is often a safe and reasonable way to stay fit which may be done on a treadmill or outside. If using a treadmill, you will have to ascertain whether or not using the arm rails hurts your injury site. Remain upright while walking and be careful about swinging your injured limb. Start with short distances (about a ¼ of a mile) and see whether this bothers your injury. If it seems ok, gradually add distance in ¼ mile increments and increase your pace.

Elliptical machine Use the hand rails to steady yourself or use the arm extensions. Gradually increase time and intensity if your injury tolerates it.