

THE JUMPER'S KNEE RECOVERY CHECKLIST

01 THE 4/10 PAIN RULE

Some discomfort isn't just tolerated — it's required. A pain level of 4/10 or below during targeted exercises confirms you are applying real therapeutic load to the tendon. Zero pain typically means under-loading. Pain above 4/10 means you've exceeded today's capacity.

✓ Rate pain before, during, and after each set. If it stays at or below 4/10 and settles within 24 hours, you're in the right window.

02 THE 5X45 SECOND ISOMETRIC STANDARD

Before progressing to dynamic loading — slow heavy squats, plyometrics, running — you must earn it. The benchmark: 5 sets of 45-second isometric holds (e.g. single-leg wall sit at 60 degrees) with no more than 4/10 pain. This ensures the tendon has adapted to sustained load before facing impact.

✓ This is the gate between rehab and return to sport. Do not skip it.

03 RESTORE YOUR ANKLE DORSIFLEXION

Limited ankle mobility forces the knee to absorb forces the ankle was built to handle. Athletes with restricted dorsiflexion place measurably higher loads on the patellar tendon with every jump landing. Old ankle sprains and tight calves are often the hidden culprit.

✓ Test: can you lunge your knee 10-12 cm past your toes without your heel lifting? If not, ankle mobility is non-negotiable before returning to sport.

04 STRENGTHEN THE POSTERIOR CHAIN

A strong quad with weak glutes and hamstrings means the patellar tendon absorbs forces the posterior chain should share. Hip abductor weakness creates knee valgus on landing — adding abnormal shear stress to the tendon with every rep.

✓ Priority movements: single-leg RDLs, Nordic curls, hip thrusts, lateral band walks.

05 LEARN TO ABSORB FORCE ON LANDING

Stiff landings — knees barely bending, trunk upright — route ground reaction forces directly into the patellar tendon. Proper landing mechanics require coordinated triple flexion at the ankle, knee, and hip. This is a trainable neuromuscular skill, not a strength issue.

✓ Before returning to jumping: practice drop landings where you can hold the bottom position for 2 seconds with no pain.

06 MANAGE TRAINING LOAD SPIKES

Tendons adapt slower than muscle. A sudden increase in volume — a tournament weekend, doubling weekly jumps, returning too fast after rest — is often the trigger. It's not the total load that matters most; it's the rate of change from one week to the next.

✓ Follow the 10% rule: do not increase weekly jumping volume by more than 10% from one week to the next.

07 AVOID THE PASSIVE REST TRAP

Complete rest feels like recovery but is one of the most common flare-up traps. Tendons need load to heal. Total rest leads to deconditioning — meaning the first return to sport hits a tendon that is even less prepared than before.

✓ Replace rest with isometric loading, stretching, and ice when necessary.

08 IDENTIFY YOUR HIDDEN OVERLOAD TRIGGERS

Certain daily habits load the patellar tendon more than most athletes expect: prolonged sitting with a bent knee, sitting on the edge of a chair, and aggressive quad stretching in a reactive tendon can all worsen symptoms.

✓ Track which non-training activities spike your pain. Often the problem isn't the workout — it's the 8 hours of desk sitting that came before it.

09 DON'T SKIP HIP MOBILITY

Restricted hip internal rotation and tight iliotibial bands alter landing mechanics and increase rotational stress at the knee. These deficits are often invisible until measured — and they quietly prevent full recovery.

✓ Add 90/90 hip mobility work and lateral hip stretches to your daily routine. Prevention here is significantly easier than rehab.

10 USE THE 24-HOUR SORENESS RULE

The patellar tendon has a delayed response. You may feel fine during a session and wake up significantly worse the next morning. This 24-hour soreness response is your most reliable feedback tool — more telling than in-session pain alone.

✓ Log pain before training, during, immediately after, and the following morning. A trend of increasing next-day scores means your load is too high.

THIS WAS THE CHECKLIST.

THE PROGRAM IS THE FULL PLAYBOOK. [LEARN MORE.](#)

The full Jumper's Knee Program takes you step-by-step through every phase — from reactive tendon management to return-to-sport — with video-guided exercises and weekly progression benchmarks.