IFAST BASKETBALL



FREE DOWNLOAD

# RTP CHECKLIST

## Where Are You in the Return-to-Play Process?

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26 years coaching • IFAST, Top 10 Gym in America 6×

# Getting back from an injury isn't always a straight-line process, but it IS systematic.

This checklist walks you through the 6 steps I use at IFAST to get basketball players, coaches, and families through the return-to-play process the right way.

Whether you're an athlete, the parent watching it happen, or the coach managing it, use this roadmap to figure out where you actually are and what comes next.

ATHLETE

INJURY

DATE

**HOW TO USE IT** Tick every box that is true for you today. Write your answers in the grey fields. Your step is the first one where you cannot tick every READY box.

**PLEASE NOTE** **Not medical advice.** This checklist is for education. It does not replace a diagnosis or clearance from a doctor or physical therapist.

## KEEP MONITORING THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS

### BREATHING, POSITION & CENTER OF GRAVITY

- [ ] Is your breathing restricted? Remember lack of breathing options = lack of movement options. And lack of movement options means a lack of total body mobility!
- [ ] Has your posture or alignment shifted because of the injury?
- [ ] Are you shifted forward and/or to one side, even at rest?

**If any of these are off, make sure you're addressing this NOW, regardless of the step you're in.**

**1** **INTERNAL TISSUE ENVIRONMENT**

☐ I'M HERE

**2** **MOBILITY & MOVEMENT CAPACITY**

☐ I'M HERE

**3** **LOCAL TISSUE HYPERTROPHY, STRENGTH & STABILITY**

☐ I'M HERE

**4** **GLOBAL MOTOR CONTROL & FORCE PRODUCTION**

☐ I'M HERE

**5** **POWER, STRETCH-SHORTENING CYCLE & IMPACT**

☐ I'M HERE

**6** **SPORT-SPECIFIC RECONDITIONING**

☐ I'M HERE

# STEPS 1 & 2

**KEEP MONITORING** **BREATHING, POSITION & CENTER OF GRAVITY** If any of these are off, make sure you're addressing this NOW, regardless of the step you're in.

## STEP 1 INTERNAL TISSUE ENVIRONMENT

**GOAL**

**Reduce swelling and inflammation so the body can move effectively**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Is the injured area still visibly swollen or puffy?
- ☐ Does swelling go down after rest but come right back with activity?

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

What movement or activity level makes the swelling worse?

Are you actively managing inflammation (ice, elevation, compression), or just waiting and hoping?

**YOU'RE READY FOR STEP 2 WHEN:**

- ☐ **Swelling is minimal or gone at rest**
- ☐ **Light activity doesn't immediately bring the swelling back**

## STEP 2 MOBILITY & MOVEMENT CAPACITY

**GOALS**

**1. Get full range of motion back at the affected joint**

**2. Make sure the whole movement system (hip, ankle, knee, etc.) works together.**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Do you have full range of motion in the injured joint compared to the healthy side?
- ☐ When you move the injured area, does your whole body compensate? (Limping, shifting weight, changing posture?)

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

Which direction feels most limited? (Bending? Straightening? Rotating?)

Are you working on just the injured joint, or the joints above and below it too?

**YOU'RE READY FOR STEP 3 WHEN:**

- ☐ **Range of motion is close to, or matches, the healthy side**
- ☐ **You can move the area through all of its various ranges of motion without obvious compensation patterns**

# STEPS 3 & 4

**KEEP MONITORING** **BREATHING, POSITION & CENTER OF GRAVITY** If any of these are off, make sure you're addressing this NOW, regardless of the step you're in.

## STEP 3 LOCAL TISSUE HYPERTROPHY, STRENGTH & STABILITY

**GOALS**

**1. Rebuild muscle size and strength in the injured area**

**2. Make sure stability and control on that side is restored**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Is there noticeable muscle loss compared to the healthy side?
- ☐ Are you doing isolated strengthening work to target the specific muscle?

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

- Is your strength in the individual muscles (quads, hamstrings, etc.) 80-90% of the healthy side?
- Are you trying to heavily load complex movements (squats, lunges) before rebuilding the muscle first?
- Do you have stability and control on the injured side? Ie can you stand on one leg or perform a body-weight split-squat without compensation?

**YOU'RE READY FOR STEP 4 WHEN:**

- ☐ **Local muscle size is coming back**
- ☐ **Strength on the injured side is 80-90% of the healthy side**
- ☐ **Stability and control are approaching the healthy side**

## STEP 4 GLOBAL MOTOR CONTROL & FORCE PRODUCTION

**GOAL**

**Rebuild strength and global movement patterns. Build strength in compound movements while watching for shifts, imbalances, or compensation.**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Can you perform compound lifts (squats, deadlifts, lunges) without obvious shifting or favoring one side?
- ☐ Are you noticeably stronger on the healthy side vs. the injured side?

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

- When you load the movement, where do you default? (Off the injured side? Shifting weight?)
- Are you using video, your coaching eye, or another tool to actually see the compensation?

**YOU'RE READY FOR STEP 5 WHEN:**

- ☐ **Compound lifts look balanced, symmetrical and strong**
- ☐ **You're handling load without obvious compensation**

# STEPS 5 & 6

**KEEP MONITORING** **BREATHING, POSITION & CENTER OF GRAVITY** If any of these are off, make sure you're addressing this NOW, regardless of the step you're in.

## STEP 5 POWER, STRETCH-SHORTENING CYCLE & IMPACT

**GOAL**

**Rebuild the "bounce": the fast, elastic, reactive stuff that makes athletes athletes.**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Are you doing plyometric or explosive work yet?
- ☐ Can you handle impact drills (planting, cutting, jumping, etc.) without pain or swelling?

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

What movement directions are you missing or not confident in? (Vertical? Lateral? Horizontal?)

Can you do the move once at intensity, but not repeatedly with confidence?

**YOU'RE READY FOR STEP 6 WHEN:**

- ☐ **You can handle impact and explosive work without swelling**
- ☐ **Confidence is there: no mental hesitation holding you back**
- ☐ **Power output feels close to pre-injury**

## STEP 6 SPORT-SPECIFIC RECONDITIONING

**GOAL**

**Prove you can perform basketball at game intensity, volume, and speed, not just in the gym.**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

- ☐ Are you doing sport-specific movements at game-speed?
- ☐ Can you repeat those movements for a full game/practice without falling apart?

**WHAT'S BLOCKING YOU?**

Can you do the move once but not repeatedly?

Is it a physical issue, mental confidence issue, or both?

Are you conditioning like a hooper (sprints, cuts, explosive reps), or just running to "get in shape"?

**YOU'RE READY FOR FULL RETURN WHEN:**

- ☐ **You can perform sport-specific activities at game intensity for a full practice, scrimmage, etc.**
- ☐ **Psychological confidence matches physical readiness**

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FINAL THOUGHT

## This framework isn't about rushing through steps or skipping ahead.

It's about respecting the process so you come back better than ever before.

Every athlete is different, and every injury is different.

If you're working with a coach, trainer, or physical therapist, use this to stay on the same page and ask the right questions.

And remember: Sometimes injuries are opportunities to rebuild your athletic foundation, not just fix the injured part.

# SO GET HEALTHY, GET STRONG, AND COME BACK READY TO DOMINATE!

**IFAST Basketball Community: free**
Questions about where you are in the process? Ask me there.

**START HERE**

New to IFAST Basketball? This is the best place to begin.