

Strength and Conditioning Programs: How Young Can You Begin Training?

Conditioning programs can really begin at any age, but how the program is executed depends on the age of the individual. Generally we look at before puberty and after puberty.

Younger kids who have not yet reached puberty can benefit from a strength and conditioning program, but it will be largely geared towards improving movement patterns. The program is not usually focused on gaining a lot of muscle, but more towards balance, agility, and posture with some strength training using primarily body weight. Once a child has reached puberty, we focus more on strength, but again making sure that they first have the correct movement patterns.

Strength and conditioning programs are starting earlier and earlier, which has a lot to do with young athletes specializing in one sport earlier. Without the balance provided by learning and practicing multiple skills for multiple sports, these athletes are more likely to have an overuse injury or create imbalances in their muscles. We don't advocate early specialization, but for those athletes that choose this route, a well-balanced strength & conditioning program is essential. Also, a lot of kids are spending a significant amount of time in front of screens. This is generally not supporting the best posture or building strength. It is another reason conditioning programs may make sense at a younger age, so long as it is an age appropriate program.

Allisa's Story: Life and Recovery After a Knee Injury

In an attempt to hit the ski slopes one last time for the season, we took a short weekend trip out to Colorado at the end of April. We started at Breckenridge, and on the third run down, my skis twisted up and I took a spill. My left binding didn't release right away and I knew when I felt that my knee twisted further than it should! After however many minutes it took to mentally convince myself I was fine, I eventually got up, popped back in and made it to the bottom of the hill. After lunch and some ibuprofen, I made it out for a few more runs. Vail was scheduled the next day, and despite significant swelling and discomfort, I still got my boots on and enjoyed runs in the sunshine and warm weather. It wasn't until that evening, walking through the airport to head back home, I noticed that my knee was giving way. I realized then that maybe I hurt it worse than I thought.

As soon as I returned home, I went to the free sports injury clinic at [Bronson Athletic Club](#). Courtney, an athletic



Allisa with Dr. Mark Sytsma at her follow-up appointment.

trainer from Bronson, confirmed a possible MCL tear. She referred me to Bronson Sports Medicine, and a week later I had an appointment with [Dr. Mark Sytsma](#). After a physical exam, X-ray and MRI of my knee, Dr. Sytsma was convinced I had a partial or complete tear of my MCL and a complete tear of my PCL. He very carefully explained all of my options, potential outcomes and together we decided to take the path of surgery, which would give me the greatest chance of returning to all the activities I love.

Surgery was scheduled at Bronson Methodist Hospital (on my 29th birthday I might add) to repair my ligaments. To say my experience through pre-op was awesome would be an understatement. *(continued on back)*

Carley Poulin, ATC, Talks to Allisa about Her Injury and Recovery

What was your biggest challenge or obstacle during your recovery process, and how were you able to overcome it?

Aside from struggling to get around, maintaining a positive outlook was probably the biggest struggle. Being immobile had a greater impact on my mental state of mind than I had anticipated. I had to rely on others for nearly everything that I was used to doing alone - taking a shower, cleaning, cooking, etc. Fortunately I had a great support system. Asking for help was often challenging to do, but my friends/family were more than willing, and just being in their company made me feel better.

How did you stay motivated during recovery to keep working towards your goals?

Baby steps - setting little goals to reach the big ones. And sometimes my goal was not to have any expectations at

all. Making an improvement when that wasn't expected was far more exciting than hitting the goal I intended. Talking to others with the same or similar experience was always encouraging. And, of course, my PT team supported me every step of way. Even though they made me cry some days, they pushed me outside of my comfort level because they knew what my ultimate goal was and what I needed to do to get there.

Where are you currently in your recovery process, and what types of things are you doing to build on the progress you have made?

I'm a little over five months post-op. I was just discharged from PT but continuing, once-a-week, *(continued on back)*

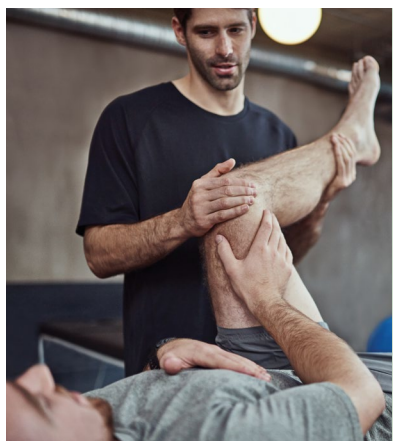
Knee Injury continued

Every person I encountered, from the front desk to the operating room to recovery, was warm, kind and encouraging. I was especially fortunate to have Connie as my pre-op nurse – it was her very last day of work before retirement. She held my hand, rubbed my arm and distracted me with conversation while the anesthesiologist inserted my pain block. I can't imagine how many hands she held in her 43 years of nursing at Bronson, but I was sure privileged to be one of her last.

When I woke up, I learned Dr. Sytsma had to reconstruct my MCL and posterior oblique ligament, reattach my PCL, and remove part of my meniscus. After learning of the added damage, I felt even more grateful that we decided on surgery to repair. Although I had seven incisions, Dr. Sytsma did a fabulous job keeping them as small as possible to reduce scarring. His experience and knowledge continue to amaze me at every single doctor's appointment. I have complete faith in his ability as a surgeon, and always felt reassured and comfortable in his presence. Andrea, his nurse, was also super helpful through my recovery. She always responded promptly to my questions in MyChart and went above and beyond during my follow-up appointments.

I had to keep my leg locked in full extension at all times and could not bear any weight for six weeks. Going from an active person to requiring crutches for nearly eight weeks was more dispiriting than I anticipated. But Bronson has a solution for that, too! My physical therapists, Tiffany and Gaurav, were like my personal cheerleaders. Three days-a-week they maintained positivity and encouragement that saw me through all my ups and downs. I dreaded physical therapy (PT) because it was far from easy, but my therapists and the entire team at [Bronson Rehabilitation Services – John St.](#) made it bearable. I also have to credit Diane and Stacey for their flexibility and patience with my PT schedule.

Four months post-surgery, I am continuing PT and signed up for a performance training program at Bronson. I can say the performance training program has been amazing! I have not felt my core burn in a long time, and it's amazing to see how quickly I am regaining strength in my knee/leg. Although I am still working toward being able to do all the activities I love – ski, bike, run, golf – I am super grateful for the progress I have made thus far. I certainly would not have made it to this point without the clinical expertise and positive encouragement from the entire team at Bronson. Thank you!



Free Sports Injury Clinics For Athletes of All Levels

Do you have an injury from training, exercising, or participating in your favorite sport? We can help.

For more information and for locations, visit: bronsonhealth.com/sportsinjuryclinics

Talking with Allisa continued

in the performance training program. My gym membership was reinstated so I can begin my (low-impact) workouts there as well. Because of my injury, running has been discouraged, so I'm working my way into the cycling world and hoping to try some aquatics classes. I'm also getting a sports massage every two-three weeks.

You have a lot of athletic hobbies. Looking towards the future, if you plan to continue to golf, cycle, ski, and stay active, what types of things will you plan to do in order to maintain the health of your body and knee?

In addition to keeping my exercise routine, I intend to wear my activity brace when needed to protect my knee. Also, I think listening to my body, knowing my limits, and when to stop is important. I certainly don't want to overdo it to the point where I'm putting myself at risk for another injury.

Do you have any advice or words of wisdom to someone who may face a similar situation?

My boyfriend would remind me always every day, it's not a linear recovery. He was right. Some weeks I felt like I was getting nowhere and other weeks I couldn't believe what I was able to accomplish. And everybody is different; that's why talking to others really helped and learning what did or did not work for them.



Carley
Poulin, ATC

Allisa's story is just one example of how a knee injury can have a significant impact on someone's life. If you or someone you know has been impacted by a knee injury, or if you are a friend or family member that is involved in the support or care of an athlete recovering from a knee injury, our free support group may help.

The Knee Injured Athlete Alliance

A free support group for athletes who have been affected by a knee injury. Family members and supporters are also welcomed to join.

If you have had a significant knee injury, such as an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear, this is a great opportunity for you to network with others who may be going through a similar experience. By attending this [support group](#), you will be able to:

- Share your story
- Meet other injured athletes as they talk about their recoveries
- Listen to professionals speak about knee injuries

**Wednesday, November 29
6 to 7:30 p.m.
Performance Training
3433 Midlink Drive
Kalamazoo**

No registration is necessary. For questions or more information, contact Carley at poulinc@bronsonhg.org or (855) 618-2676, ext. 4578.