Conservative Patellofemoral Rehabilitation
(non-surgical)

Below is a suggested progression. Advancement to the next phase, as well as specific exercises performed, should be individually based.

Phase I (1 – 5 days post-injury/onset of symptoms)

- Modalities: prn for pain and inflammation (ice, IFC)
  - Consider kinesiotaping to aid in reduction of swelling
  - Consider taping to aid in patellar tracking
    - McConnell taping for patellar tilt, glide, and/or malrotation
    - Kinesiotaping for VMO activation and/or Vastus Lateralis inhibition
    - Bracing to increase medicalization of patella

- ROM:
  - PROM prn/AROM in pain-free range (heel slides)

- Exercises:
  - Patellar mobs as tolerated
  - Stationary bike, if pain-free
  - Stretching as appropriate/needed: quad, ITB, hamstring, calf, hip musculature
  - Consider deep friction massage for ITB
  - Hip/knee strengthening (open-chain)
    - Focusing on hip/ankle strengthening if knee exercises are not tolerated
  - General quad strengthening is more important than VMO activation
  - Quad sets

- Evaluate other areas:
  - Possible overuse patterns (athletics, work activities)
  - Foot biomechanics/wear
    - Excessive pronation during mid-stance can limit tibial ER which then limits knee ext
    - Semi-rigid orthoses suggested for increased shock absorption and arch support
  - Hip tightness/weakness, poor pelvic control
    - Stretching of TFL, ITB, hip flexors
    - Glut med weakness- sidelying abduction, side planks
    - Glut max weakness- front planks with hip extension, glut sets
    - Femur IR vs. knee valgus
Phase II (5 days – 4 weeks post-injury/onset of symptoms)

- Modalities: continue PRN
- ROM/Stretching: Continue as in phase I
- Strengthening:
  - Progress with closed-chain strengthening as tolerated
    - Step ups, Lateral step ups, Squats, Leg press
  - Continue to focus on hip strengthening
  - Begin with double leg balance (rockerboard) and progress to single leg

Phase III (4+ weeks post-injury/onset of symptoms)

- Modalities: continue PRN
- ROM: Continue as in phase I/II, but more aggressive
- Strengthening:
  - Progress to more dynamic closed-chain strengthening and balance exercises
  - Progress to single leg as tolerated
  - 6+ weeks or when patient is ready:
    - Advance to running and agility drills, plyometrics, and sport-specific activities as tolerated
    - Functional test: less than 25% deficit for non-athletes and less than 20% deficit for athletes
      - Can include, but not limited to: Stand and Reach balance test, Star Excursion Balance test, Hop tests, 1 Rep max on leg press, Single leg wall sit, Single leg squat test

Adapted From:

1) Brotzman SB, Wilk KE. Clinical Orthopedic Rehabilitation. 2nd Ed. Philadelphia: Mosby; 2003