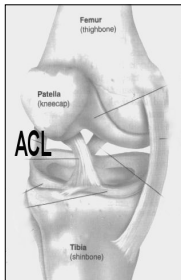




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ANTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT (ACL) Frequently Asked Questions



What is the ACL?

The ACL is a ligament which runs in the middle of the knee joint. Its function is to keep the knee stable when pivoting. It is commonly injured. When the ACL is torn you may find that your knee 'gives way'. You may not be able to 'trust your knee'.

How is a tear of the ACL treated?

The ACL does not heal once torn. The ends retract from the bony attachments. For some patients a course of physiotherapy and a brace will prevent further problems. For others surgery will be needed to prevent disabling problems.

Do I need to have an operation?

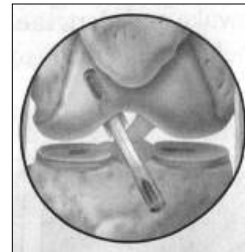
This depends upon your activity level. If you are mainly involved in sedentary activities and straight line sports then you may not require surgery. However, if you intend to return to pivoting sports, such as squash or football, then you will most likely need a reconstruction. If your knee starts to give way despite a course of physiotherapy and strengthening, then you will need to have the ligament reconstructed in order to return to your sport or activity.

What are the problems if my knee continues to give way?

Other structures within the knee may be damaged, including the meniscus and surface of the joint. Often, these structures cannot be repaired, and the damage of these structures may result in arthritis.

What is done during the operation?

The ACL is reconstructed using a substitute ligament. Often the hamstring tendons are used. These tendons regenerate in 6 months. Bony tunnels are made in the shin and thigh bone to accommodate the graft. The surgery is done with keyhole incisions using an arthroscope. It takes 12 weeks for the graft to attach to the bone.



When can I return to Sport and Work?

This depends of the type of sport and work you wish to perform. If you have a desk job you should be able to get back within 2 weeks. You can swim and use a stationary bike within 4 weeks. If you work on uneven ground or are involved in manual heavy work it will take 3 months to return.

For higher level pivoting sports you can get back to heavy training after 6 months. However, you should not compete in these sports for 12 months. It has been shown that early return to competition results in a higher failure rate of the graft. Consider these exercises before competition: [FIFA 11 Plus Program](#).

What are the complications of the surgery?

Complications are unusual. However these include: infection, bleeding and transient numbness of a small area of skin below the knee cap. Serious problems are unusual. Rarely, the graft may fail. To get a good result it is important to follow a physiotherapy program.

What are the results of the Surgery?

90% of patients are happy with the result. About 5% of patients may have ongoing problems with a persistent unstable knee.

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