

ACL Reconstruction — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) Tear

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

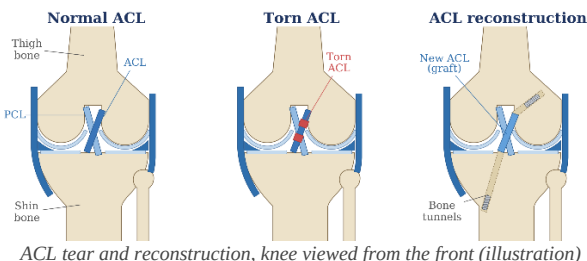
The **anterior cruciate ligament (ACL)** is a strong band in the center of the knee that keeps the shin bone from sliding forward and twisting. It usually tears with a sudden stop, cut, or landing. Without it, the knee can give way with pivoting, damaging the meniscus and cartilage over time.

The surgery

ACL reconstruction is a typically outpatient surgery done through small incisions with a camera. The torn ACL is replaced with a tendon graft (the type will be discussed with you) placed in small bone tunnels. Your surgeon may also treat a torn meniscus or add an outer-knee reinforcement (**LET**). The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Most patients regain a stable knee and return to sports. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, graft stretching or re-tear, pain at the front of the knee or with kneeling, injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility. In general, you should have nothing to eat or drink starting at midnight the night before surgery.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** Crutches are typically arranged beforehand; a knee brace is added if a meniscus repair is planned. Practice with crutches.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for within the first few days after surgery.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper for the first few days and remove trip hazards.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the knee.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, photo ID, and crutches/brace if you have them.
- Wear loose clothing; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; most patients go home the same day.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Weight-bearing	Full weight right away, with crutches until you walk normally (typically 2–4 weeks); no brace. With a meniscus repair: a locked brace and protected weight for ~6 weeks.
Motion	Full straightening comes first; bending to ~115° by 6 weeks and full motion by 3 months. Stationary bike from 2–3 weeks.
Daily life	Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Running	Typically 12–16 weeks (not before 16 weeks with a meniscus repair).
Sports	No sooner than 8–9 months, after passing strength, hop, and readiness testing; most athletes return at 9–12 months.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Your condition: ACL Injuries** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/anterior-cruciate-ligament-acl-injuries/>
- **Your procedure: ACL Reconstruction** — <https://acltear.info/acl-reconstruction-faq/>
- **Video:** You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at <https://www.orthoinfo.org/treatment/acl-reconstruction-animation/> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedia.com/student/catalog>).