

PCL Reconstruction — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

Colby Wollenman, M.D.

Isolated Posterior Cruciate Ligament (PCL) Tear

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

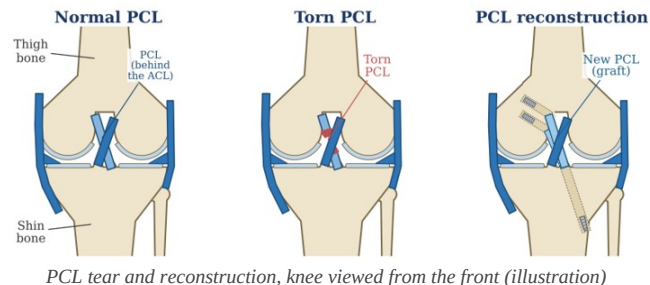
The **posterior cruciate ligament (PCL)** in the center of the knee keeps the shin bone from sliding backward. It usually tears from a blow to the front of the shin, such as a dashboard injury or a fall onto a bent knee. A torn PCL can cause instability, pain, and cartilage wear over time.

The surgery

PCL reconstruction is a typically outpatient surgery done through small incisions with a camera, sometimes with a small added incision. The torn PCL is replaced with a tendon graft placed in small bone tunnels; the graft type will be discussed with you. Meniscus or cartilage problems may also be treated. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Most patients have a more stable knee and better function. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, remaining looseness or graft stretching, loss of knee motion, injury to nearby structures (such as cartilage or, rarely, the blood vessels and nerves behind the knee), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



PCL tear and reconstruction, knee viewed from the front (illustration)

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:** A knee brace and crutches are typically arranged beforehand; a PCL brace is fitted ~2 weeks after surgery.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for within about a week 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 brace/crutches 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)
Brace & motion	Locked straight for walking and sleep for 6 weeks; a dynamic PCL brace (fitted at ~2 weeks once swelling has calmed down) is worn full time until 6 months. Bending to 90° by 2 weeks and 110° by 6 weeks.
Weight-bearing	Typically full weight with crutches and the brace locked straight (some knees need touch-down weight-bearing at first). Crutches are weaned after 6 weeks; normal walking by ~8 weeks.
Daily life	Desk work often within 2 weeks. Hamstring exercises wait until 12 weeks, with resisted hamstring work from 16 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Running	Not before 20 weeks, once strength and knee stability allow.
Sports	No sooner than 9 months, after strength and functional testing (typically 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 and procedure: Posterior Cruciate Ligament Injuries** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/posterior-cruciate-ligament-injuries/>

Video: You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at

<https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/activity/2265965-posterior-cruciate-ligament-pcl-tears> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).

Questions before surgery? Call our office at (972) 378-1438. For a medical emergency, call 911.