

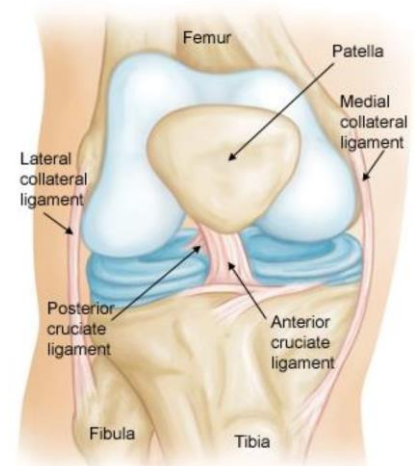
ACL Tear

WHAT IS THE ACL?

The ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) is one of four stabilizing ligaments of the knee. Along with the PCL, LCL, MCL, and the meniscus, it helps to stabilize the knee with twisting and pivoting motions.

HOW DO THEY TEAR?

An ACL tear is typically caused by a non-contact twisting or pivoting injury, but can be caused by traumatic events or uneven landing after jumping. These types of injuries can cause injuries to other parts of the knee as well. Athletes, particularly those who play cutting or twisting sports, are at higher risk for tears of the meniscus.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

A traumatic ACL tear typically causes significant swelling over the few hours following the injury and pain. Sometimes, patients can hear an audible “pop” when the ligament tears. As the swelling resolves over the next few weeks, patients can have resolution of their symptoms. However, upon returning to agility, twisting, and pivoting movements, the knee often feels unstable.

DO I NEED SURGERY?

Surgery is an elective treatment based on the activity level and/or limitations of the patient. Without surgery, it is unlikely to return to agility, twisting, or pivoting movements. If instability is limiting daily activities, surgery should be discussed as well. Most ACL tears cannot be repaired and will need to be reconstructed using a graft. There are many graft options, and this should be discussed further with the surgeon. Many people will require physical therapy to regain full range of motion prior to surgery for the best outcome. Significant physical therapy is required after surgery for a successful outcome.

Individuals not interested in returning to agility sports and without instability during daily activities can be treated with physical therapy with or without a functional ACL brace.

ARE THERE ANY ADVERSE OUTCOMES?

An unstable knee can lead to new injuries. This can lead to an increased risk of osteoarthritis later in life. Surgery also poses some risks including infections, blood clots, surgery complications, and stiffness. The graft choice can also play a role in the potential complications, which is why this should be discussed with the surgeon.