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Rehabilitation programme following knee ligament surgery

A patient's guide

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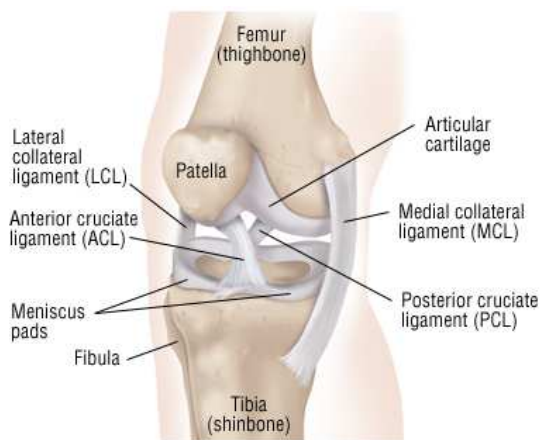
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Introduction

The anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in your knee is a tough band of tissue joining the thigh bone to the shin bone at the knee joint. It runs diagonally through the inside of the knee and provides stability. Injury to this ligament is often sports related.



Source: www.drugs.com

If you have had reconstructive surgery following a tear to your anterior cruciate ligament, it is very important that you follow a structured rehabilitation programme, so that your recovery is as successful as possible.

We run a two stage rehabilitation programme. During the early stage, we work with you to regain strength and movement. In the late stage, we aim to achieve specific goals and help you return to your previous levels of activity.

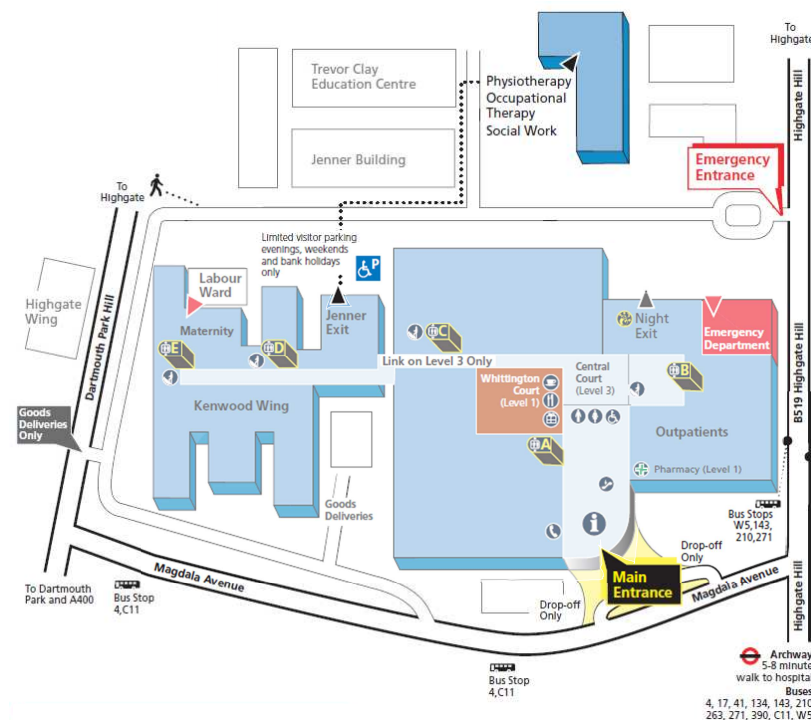
Recovery from surgery usually takes around six months, however, it can take up to a year to regain full function of your knee. Patients who are dedicated to the programme and complete it, recover faster and experience fewer knee problems in the future.

Anterior cruciate ligament rehabilitation programme

Class: Early stage
Day: Tuesday
Time: 8.00am - 9.00am

Class: Late stage
Day: Wednesday
Time: 8.00am - 9.00am

Location: Physiotherapy Service
Whittington Hospital
(Highgate Hill entrance)





Attendance policy

Once you are enrolled onto the anterior cruciate ligament rehabilitation programme, you are expected to attend your class every week. This is to ensure a full recovery.

If you are unable to attend, please call our physiotherapy service reception at least 24 hours in advance on 020 7288 5660.

If you miss a class and we do not hear from you within the following five days, we may discharge you from the programme.

As you approach the end of the programme and you are completing exercises independently outside of the class, your physiotherapist may discuss reducing your attendance to once every two or three weeks.

Notes

Early stage ACL rehabilitation class

These classes start the week following your surgery. You should attend this class every week for approximately ten weeks, until you have achieved certain levels of strength and movement.

If you have been using crutches to help you move around, you may need to continue for a further one to two weeks. It is important to only put as much weight on your injured leg as you feel comfortable with.

Aims

- To bend, straighten and raise your knee
- Regain 80 per cent strength in your operated knee
- Improve your balance
- Walk with ease

Exercises


Mobility exercises will include movements to bend, straighten and raise your leg, whilst strengthening exercises will develop your muscles until you are able to hop and jog in a straight line.

What you can expect

When you attend your first class, the physiotherapist will remove the bandages from your knee and assess how much movement you have in your knee joint.

Following surgery, you will have been given exercises to start whilst in hospital and to continue at home. You will be asked to perform those exercises and if you are experiencing difficulties, your physiotherapist may suggest alternative exercises or offer you advice on how to improve your technique.

You will be advised how often to continue these exercises for over the following week.



Throughout the programme, your physiotherapist will check your progress each week and occasionally alter your exercises.

The early stage classes focus on exercising without putting rotational stresses on the knee. After approximately 10 weeks, your physiotherapist will perform specific tests to determine whether you are ready to progress to the next stage.

Do not run

It can be dangerous to run too soon after anterior cruciate ligament reconstructive surgery, as this may cause further injury. Once you have regained enough strength to support your knee, your physiotherapist will advise you that it is safe to try to run. The earliest you can attempt to run will be approximately 10-12 weeks after your surgery.

Late stage ACL rehabilitation class

In the next set of classes, your physiotherapist will work with you to progress you to running and specific activities to enable you to return to your preferred sport or activity. You should attend this class every week for approximately ten weeks.

Aims

These are individually tailored for each patient to ease them back into their preferred activity. It may include some of the following:

- Running
- Football
- Rugby
- Basketball
- Skiing
- Gymnastics
- Dancing

You may also need to return to physical tasks within your job and your physiotherapist will help you achieve your goal to carry out these tasks safely and at the appropriate time.

Exercises

The exercises will depend on your individual sport. We will continue working with you to:

- Regain full strength and endurance through a combination of gym and home based exercise.
- Restore your balance, control and agility by practicing exercises which include balancing on one leg, hopping side-to-side and jumping hurdles.
- Increase your ability to tolerate impact during physical activity via use of gym equipment such as the trampette, hurdles and bench.

What you can expect

Once you have achieved full strength and control in the operated leg, including movement in all directions, your physiotherapist will advise you on how to re-introduce training for sports and activities, eventually leading to full participation.

An important part of your rehabilitation programme will be regaining the confidence to use your knee to its full ability. It is normal to feel anxious, however, if you follow the advice from your consultant and physiotherapist, you can return to your preferred activities without fear, when your knee has recovered.

Ask questions at any time

Your physiotherapist will be happy to help you if you are unsure about how to do any of the exercises or have any questions.