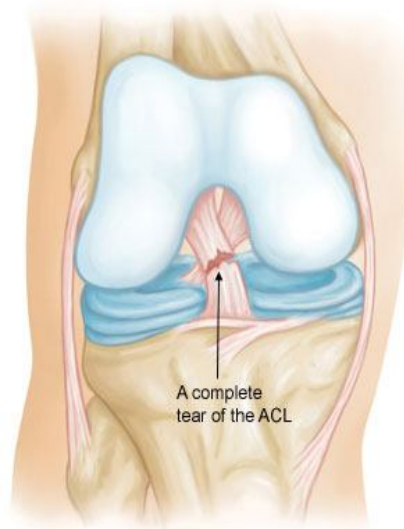


## ANTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT (ACL) INJURY

An anterior cruciate ligament or 'ACL' injury refers to a tear in one of the cruciate ligaments inside the knee joint.



The ACL is most commonly injured when the knee is twisted. This can happen when landing from a jump, pivoting or decelerating suddenly, or if a fellow competitor hits the side of your knee.

An ACL injury is associated with pain within the knee or at the front of the knee. If the ACL is completely torn the pain may subside after a few minutes. This may be accompanied with an audible 'pop' or 'snap', crack or tear. The knee may also swell and you may have difficulty putting weight through the knee as it may have the feeling of instability. Swelling can occur over a period of hours

If you suspect an ACL injury you should stop your activity immediately and commence the R.I.C.E regime. This consists of:

- **Rest** – ceasing your activity or sport and limiting the amount of weight which goes through your leg. Crutches may be required
- **Ice** – should be applied to the injured site for 15-20 minutes every 1-2 hours. Never apply ice directly to the skin, a damp cloth is a good medium
- **Compression** – involves the application of a firm elastic bandage around your knee
- **Elevation** – with the leg raised so that it is above the level of your heart

During the first 78 hours the **NO HARM** approach should be undertaken. This involves no:

- **Heat**
- **Alcohol**
- **Running**
- **Massage**

In the few days following a potential ACL injury you should seek the professional opinion of a physiotherapist or sports doctor. A physiotherapist or doctor will be able to determine which tissues have been damaged and the extent of this damage, subsequently determining an appropriate treatment regimen.

A physiotherapist or sports doctor may need the assistance of an X-RAY or MRI to assess the true severity of the injury and to determine if other structures in the knee are affected, such as menisci or neighbouring ligaments. Surgical intervention is often the treatment of choice with a torn ACL because this ligament does not heal by itself. During surgery, tissues from another part of your body are used to 'reconstruct' the new ligament. Rehabilitation following surgery ranges from 9-12 months depending on the demands of the patient.

In the rare instance, an ACL injury may be suitable for physiotherapy alone if the majority of the ligament is still intact and there is no looseness or giving way within the joint. Similar rehabilitation protocols exist between this and after surgery.

After surgery a comprehensive rehabilitation program can usually get the patient back to sport within 9-12 months. In this situation physiotherapy may consist of:

- Ultrasound therapy
- Interferential therapy
- Massage
- Joint mobilisation
- Exercise prescription and strengthening exercises
- Stretching
- Proprioception exercises

All of these treatment options are designed to reduce swelling and pain, improve your joint flexibility and strengthen the muscles around your knee joint to assist in your return to work or sport.