

# After Your Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) Repair

## Information for patients recovering after surgery

Read this brochure to learn about:

- How to take care of yourself at home
- What activities are safe to do
- How to cope with pain
- Problems to watch for
- When to get medical help
- What to know about your follow-up visit



**You have had an anesthetic or narcotic medicine.**

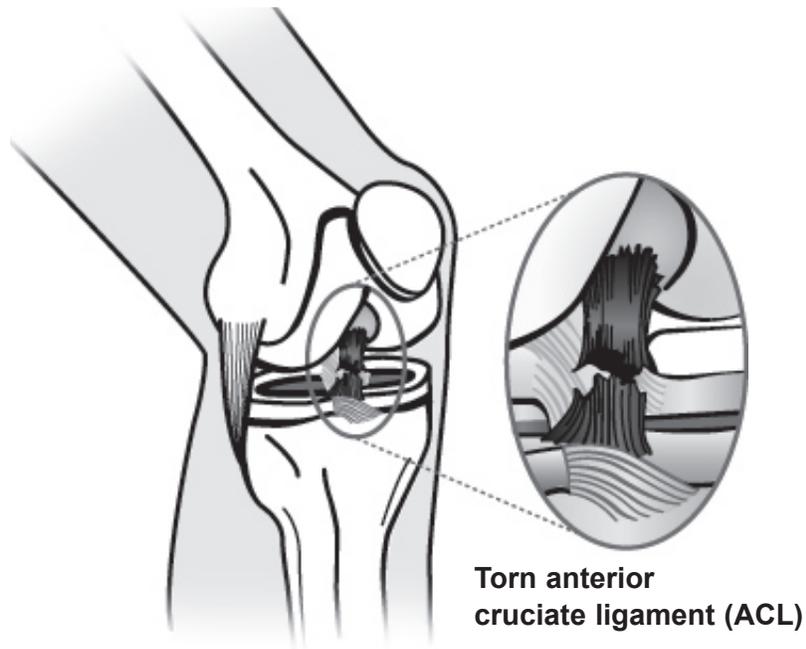
- Do not drive a car or drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Have an adult stay with you overnight.



## What is Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) Repair?

ACL stands for anterior cruciate ligament. ACL repair is surgery done to help lessen pain and swelling in your knee.

Your surgeon will reconstruct the ligament in the centre of your knee to help you move your knee normally again and make the muscles around your knee stronger.



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## **What can I eat and drink after my surgery?**

You can gradually return to eating and drinking as normal. Start slowly by having fluids and soup on the first day of the surgery.

If you are feeling nauseated (sick to your stomach) or you are vomiting, you can get anti-nausea medicine (such as Gravol) from your pharmacy without a prescription. Take it as directed and keep drinking fluids until the nausea passes. Then slowly return to eating your usual meals.

## **How much activity is safe?**

### **Things you can do:**

- Rest on your first day home from hospital.
- When you are sitting or lying down, raise your foot up on 1 or 2 pillows. This prevents swelling and bleeding.
- Start taking short walks around your home. If you were given a Range of Motion (ROM) brace, you must always wear it while you are walking. Your surgeon will decide what the range of motion will be.
- If you have a brace, you can only remove it when:
  - lying in bed, or
  - changing your dressing, or
  - washing your leg
- When you are up walking, you can use crutches or a walker.
- You may put as much weight as tolerated on your operated leg. If you have never used crutches before, follow the instructions in the “How to Use Crutches” pamphlet.
  - Ask your nurse for the pamphlet or visit our website at [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca)
- Slowly begin to do more of your everyday activities.

- You can walk up and down stairs, but remember to hold onto the rail at all times.
- Your surgeon will let you know when to begin physiotherapy.
- Your surgeon will tell you when you can go back to work and sports. The time you have to wait depends on your job and the sport you play.

### **Things you should NOT do:**

- Do not put pillows directly under your operated knee. Place the pillows under your calf or foot.
- Do not cross your legs.
- If you have a brace, do NOT walk without your brace on your operated knee.
- Do not change the settings of your ROM brace. Do not move your leg beyond the ROM setting on the brace.
- Do not stand for long periods at a time.
- No tiring physical activities, exercises or sports until your surgeon tells you it is safe.

If you had a Regional Block (if your foot had been frozen) it may take a few hours for the feeling in your foot to feel normal again.

**Important:** Don't walk or move around more than you have to until all the feeling and movement returns.

## How do I take care of my wound?

- Always keep the wound or dressing clean and dry.
- If you have the large dressing (called a Jones dressing), your surgeon will remove it at your first follow-up appointment. This is usually a few days after your surgery. An ROM brace may be put on at that time.
- Do NOT remove the dressing unless instructed to do so by your surgeon.

### **If you were instructed to remove your dressing:**

- Take off your dressing 5 days after your surgery.
- If you have stitches, put a bandage over your wound once you have taken off the dressing. You will need to wear bandages for the next 7 to 10 days (until the stitches are removed).
- **If you have steri-strips, leave them in place until they peel off on their own.** You do not have to wear bandages over the steri-strips.
- Your stitches should be taken off in 12 to 14 days. Make an appointment with your family doctor to have this done or make an appointment at the Fracture Clinic (416 603 5858) at the Toronto Western Hospital.

## How do I shower or bathe?

- You can take a shower 3 days after your surgery. You must cover your operated leg or dressing with a plastic waterproof cover or a plastic bag. Make sure NOT to get your dressing wet.
- Remove your ROM brace when you take a shower. Be careful when stepping out of the shower. Pat the wound dry and put your ROM brace back on as soon as you get out of the shower.
- NO baths or swimming until your surgeon says it is safe to do so.

## **How do I cope with pain?**

It's normal to feel pain after having surgery. Your pain should get better after a few days. We will give you a prescription for pain medicine, and possibly for swelling. Take the prescription to a pharmacy and follow the directions for taking the medication.

After the first 24 hours, you can gradually decrease your pain medicine as you feel more comfortable. (Take less and less pain medicine until you don't need any.)

During the surgery, your surgeon may have put a tourniquet on your thigh and inflated it to control bleeding. The pressure from the tourniquet can sometimes cause discomfort and bruising of your thigh. This is normal and will get better with time.

## **Safely store and dispose of your pain medicine**

Pain medicine that is not stored or disposed of safely could be stolen or taken by mistake.

### **Safe storage**

- Store pain medicine in a locked drawer or cabinet.
- Do not share your pain medicine. Pain medicine prescribed to you can be dangerous to others.

### **Safe disposal**

It is dangerous to keep unused or expired pain medicine that you no longer need.

- Take unused or expired pain medicine to a pharmacy for safe disposal.
- Do not flush medicine down the toilet.
- Do not throw medicine in the garbage.

## How does a Cold Compress Cuff help?

Cold therapy (using ice packs) helps to bring down your pain and swelling after surgery.

Ice packs can only be used on your knee if you have the thin dressing. Ice packs cannot be used with the large, white dressing.

- Put the ice pack on your knee for 15 to 20 minutes every hour while you are awake.
- Do this every day for the first 5 to 10 days after your surgery.
- Do not put the ice pack directly on your skin.
- Be careful not to get your dressing wet.

If you bought the Cold Compress Cuff:

- Wear it as much as possible for the first week, and then as needed. Follow the directions included with the Cuff.

**Do not use heat packs on your operated knee.**

## What if I get constipated?

Pain medication can cause constipation. To prevent constipation:

- Drink 3 to 5 glasses of water every day (each glass should be about 8 ounces).
- Eat foods that are high in fibre such as bran and fruit.
- If you have not had a bowel movement for 72 hours, take Milk of Magnesia. You can get this from your pharmacy without a prescription. Follow the directions on the bottle.

## What to do in an emergency



**Call your surgeon's office or go to the nearest emergency department if the following happens:**

### **Bleeding that won't stop**

- The bleeding does not stop and soaks the dressing.
- Press on the area for 30 minutes. Raise your leg with a few pillows and apply ice.

### **Pain**

- If your pain becomes very bad and it doesn't get better when you take the pain medicine that we prescribed, call your surgeon or family doctor. Please have the phone number for your pharmacy ready because the doctor may want to call the pharmacy to change your prescription.

### **Swelling**

- If your foot or ankle is very swollen, or
- Your toes are cold or have changed colour (they are pale or bluish), or
- You have less feeling in your foot or ankle, or
- You can't move your toes

### **Fever**

- Temperature higher than 38 °C or 101 °F.

## When is my follow-up appointment?

If you don't already have a follow-up appointment, please call your surgeon's office to make one.

Surgeon: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Fracture Clinic**

Fell Pavilion – 1st Floor (Room 577)  
Toronto Western Hospital  
399 Bathurst Street  
Phone: 416 603 5858

- For Altum Health patients:** If you are getting follow-up care at Altum Health, they will call you with the date, time and location of your appointment.

For more information visit [www.uhn.ca](http://www.uhn.ca) and [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca)



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