

acl tears in knees common, yet painful

The anterior cruciate ligament, or ACL, is a main stabilizing ligament of the knee joint. It attaches the thighbone to the shinbone. It's located directly in the center of the knee joint and is critical to normal motion of the knee. Without a functioning ACL, there are abnormal motions in the knee that lead to instability and breakdown of the cartilage.

A tear in the ACL is a common knee injury.

It often occurs with a hyperextension or twisting injury to the knee. Patients often will hear or feel a pop in the knee at the time of the injury, and pain and swelling often accompany the injury.

After the symptoms of the initial injury have subsided, the patients often complain of a sense that their knee is unstable, or that it feels like it will buckle.

The diagnosis of an ACL tear is made by considering the symptoms, the physical examination and diagnostic test such as MRI.

If an ACL tear is confirmed, the treatment is based on the patient's age, symptoms and desired activity levels. Non-surgical treatment

options include physical therapy, protective bracing and avoiding pivoting and jumping activities.

Surgical reconstruction of the ACL is performed for two main reasons. First, it can allow the patient to resume strenuous activities that involve pivoting and jumping. Second, it can protect the cartilage in the knee and decrease the risk of arthritis in the future.

Surgical treatment does not involve repairing the torn ligament. The torn ligament is actually removed and it is replaced with a tendon from another part of the patient's body, or with a tendon from a cadaver.

The surgery is performed arthroscopically and on an outpatient basis.

Patients are allowed to walk on the extremity as soon as they feel comfortable and usually begin physical therapy one to two weeks after the surgery.

Rehabilitation after ACL reconstruction is critical to the success of the procedure. The physical therapy involves two to three sessions a week as many as 12 weeks. Patients also perform daily therapy. The expected recovery time to full jumping and pivoting activities ranges from three to nine months. ★



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