YOUR ACL JOURNEY
Injury to Recovery
If you are an athlete diagnosed with an ACL tear, you may feel devastated. You may be worried about returning to your sport. You may miss your team.

You are not alone. Every year, more than 400,000 ACL tears occur, and most athletes return to their sports. You, too, can follow in the footsteps of athletes like Brandi Chastain and Tom Brady who have conquered an ACL tear.

Treating athletes with ACL tears is the heart of what our ACL Program team does every day. Our orthopedic surgeons, sports medicine doctors, physician assistants, athletic trainers and sports psychologists are with you every step of the way. We are committed to helping you get back to your sport and working with you to prevent other injuries.
First visit

- Your doctor, typically a sports medicine physician or orthopedic surgeon, uses tests to stress the knee and usually orders an MRI to confirm that the ACL is torn.

- Your doctor prescribes four to six weeks of pre-habilitation (pre-hab) exercises often done with a physical therapist—leg raises, stationary biking and elliptical jogging—to strengthen the knee. Research suggests better outcomes, including improved range of motion after surgery, for patients who pre-hab.

- You are measured for an ACL brace. Your doctor specifies how and when to wear the brace. It may take a few weeks to make the brace. Surgery is usually scheduled for a date three to six weeks after the injury. Waiting a few weeks allows swelling around the knee to go down and some strength and flexibility to be regained.
Surgery

- Surgery takes place at Boston Children’s locations in Boston or Waltham and typically lasts between two to three hours. Our team makes sure to provide you with the best possible experience.

  - Iliotibial band reconstruction of the ACL, a special technique, recommended for younger teens and pre-teens, typically requires an overnight stay in the hospital.

  - ACL reconstruction surgery, the technique most often recommended for teens and young adults, is often performed as an outpatient surgery. Patients can have surgery and go home the same day.
After surgery

- You are given crutches.

- You miss about one week of school.

- There are different ways that you begin to rebuild strength and flexibility after surgery.

  - Your doctor may prescribe a continuous passive motion (CPM) device. The CPM is used several hours daily to gently flex and extend the knee and help restore range of motion. Using the CPM may be uncomfortable. Try to watch a favorite movie to help pass the time, and ask friends or teammates to join you. CPM is usually used for the first two weeks after surgery, and then physical therapy is started.

  - If the CPM machine is not used, your doctor may instead have you start physical therapy three to five days after surgery.
2 weeks after surgery

- Your doctor examines your knee.
- Sutures may need to be removed at this visit. Your doctor may use absorbable sutures, which do not require removal, during surgery.
- If you have not started physical therapy, your doctor usually prescribes it at this visit.

2 weeks to 3 to 6 months after surgery

- Progressive physical therapy is done to keep your knee flexible and strengthen your knee. After a few months, you will be able to ride a stationary bike. It’s important to stay focused and committed to your physical therapy. Your hard work will pay off later when you return to sports.
- As early as three months after surgery, you may begin a jogging program that slowly progresses from walking to jogging to running.
6 months after surgery

- Many regional patients schedule a return-to-sports assessment at The Micheli Center for Sports Injury Prevention. A trainer tests your strength, agility and balance to determine if you are ready to return to sports. About one-half of patients are ready to return to sports six months after surgery.

- You continue to wear your ACL brace for sports participation for one to two years following surgery.

9 months after surgery

- Many regional patients schedule a sports re-evaluation at The Micheli Center for Sports Injury Prevention. Most patients—93 percent—are cleared for sports at this time.

12, 18 and 24 months after surgery

- Follow-up appointments are scheduled with your orthopedic surgeon. You may be followed until you have finished growing if you are younger at the time of surgery.
Boston Children’s ACL Program provides diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care for ACL injuries. Call 617-355-3501 to schedule an appointment at any of our locations:

- Boston Children’s Hospital
- Boston Children’s at Lexington
- Boston Children’s at Peabody
- Boston Children’s at Waltham

For injury prevention services and return-to-play assessments call The Micheli Center at 781-373-2760.

bostonchildrens.org/ACLProgram
facebook.com/SportsMedicineBoston

Subscribe to Athlete’s EDGE newsletter for tips on injury prevention and more.

bostonchildrens.org/athletesedge