ACL tears and athletes

ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) tears are one of the most common orthopedic injuries in the United States. Every year, more than 400,000 U.S. athletes — many of them children, teens and young adults — contend with an ACL tear.

There is a higher risk of an ACL tear among athletes who play sports that involve frequent cutting and twisting motions:

- soccer
- basketball
- football
- gymnastics
- lacrosse
Unparalleled surgical expertise — and much more — for young athletes

Treating athletes with ACL tears is the heart of what Boston Children’s ACL Program does every day. We care for child, teen and young adult athletes — from aspiring novices to Olympic competitors — and we are committed to helping every athlete return to sports safely. We offer:

- expert ACL surgeons
- research-based injury prevention and return-to-play programs
- psychological support for athletes when needed

“*When a competitive athlete is injured, we focus on making sure she can return to her pre-injury performance level. Elite athletes are typically eager to get back to their sport. It’s our job to help them hold off until they are strong enough.”*  
— Martha Murray, MD, orthopedic surgeon
Our team
The ACL Program provides the best possible care and guides a safe return to sports. Our team includes:

- orthopedic surgeons
- sports medicine physicians
- injury prevention specialists
- psychologists
- nutritionists

We’re here to answer your questions and to support you every step of the way with fast and coordinated care.

“During my post-surgery checkups Dr. Kocher instilled in me the confidence I needed to keep moving forward.”
—Andrea, varsity athlete

“Ask about nonsurgical vs. surgical treatment if your young teen tears an ACL. Nonsurgical treatment may be risky due to high rates of arthritis.”
—Mininder Kocher, MD, MPH, orthopedic surgeon
A legacy of innovation

For decades our team has led the way in developing new ACL surgical techniques, and they continue to drive innovation today.

Lyle Micheli, MD, director of Boston Children’s Sports Medicine Division, pioneered an ACL surgical technique for growing children in 1979. The operation did not interfere with the child’s future growth. It has been used in younger children since then, with excellent long-term results.

“It’s possible for a young patient with a torn ACL to delay surgery, but walking around with an ACL injury can be painful and increases the patient’s risk for additional injury.”
—Benton Heyworth, MD, ACL surgeon
The future of ACL care

Murray and Micheli launched a safety trial for bridge-enhanced ACL repair (BEAR) in 2015. The new technique uses stitches and a bridging scaffold to stimulate healing of the torn ACL.*

The goal of the operation is to promote ACL healing and eliminate the need for a tissue graft.

*Researchers at Boston Children’s continue to work with the FDA to evaluate the safety and efficacy of the technique. As of late 2015, BEAR is available only in a trial setting.
Injury prevention and return to sports

Research-based ACL injury prevention programs reduce risk for an ACL tear or re-injury. We recommend these programs for athletes who participate in high-risk sports and for post-operative ACL patients.


“It’s hard to decrease patients’ risk for many orthopedic injuries. ACL tears are one major exception. Scientific data shows specific ACL prevention exercises can reduce risk of re-injury.”

—Dennis Kramer, MD, ACL surgeon
For an appointment, a second opinion or more information about ACL care, call 617-355-3501.