

Postoperative ACL repair frequently asked questions

When do I take the narcotic pain medication, and for how long?

Don't try to tough it out the first 48 hours or so after your surgery — plan on taking the medication fairly regularly. **Start taking your pain medication as soon as you have sensations in your toes or any knee pain.** If your block is still in effect when you go to bed, take the pain medication immediately before going to bed, and with the help of a caregiver, set an alarm to take it every four hours through the night until the block wears off. Reassess every three to four hours taking your pain medication as prescribed. After 48 hours, feel free to taper down the amount of pills and/or frequency that you are taking the medication until you are off of them completely and only on over-the-counter medications and ice.

When can I remove my dressings and bathe, and how do I bathe?

You may remove the dressings and brace to shower while seated in a shower chair (or otherwise in a seated position) 48 hours following your surgery. Do not submerge your knee in water until your sutures have been removed for several days and the wound appears healed, not red, and 'water tight.' Do not bear weight on the leg if the brace is off. Make sure to follow the range of motion (knee bend) restrictions as written on the postoperative reconstruction knee surgery restrictions sheet that was given to you after surgery.

Do I need to apply a new dressing to my incisions?

Cover the wounds with new bandages daily until you are seen in the office.

When can I drive?

You should not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medications. If your surgery is on the left side, you may drive if off narcotics, generally are feeling and moving well, and if your vehicle has an automatic transmission.

If your surgery was on the right side, do not drive until you have been given permission to and successfully have weaned from your brace. You should have full control of your leg muscles, near full motion, and minimal pain. Until that time you may not have the ability to react rapidly in an emergency situation and/or may damage your repair. You should therefore refrain from driving for **four to six weeks** or until you no longer need your brace.

When can I stop taking aspirin?

We recommend you take a baby aspirin every 12 hours for 30 days following your surgery to prevent a blood clot in your legs.

When can I go back to work?

Typically within two weeks or when pain allows. It is reasonable to wait until your first postop appointment to discuss this with your provider. Return to full duty work without restrictions will be based on your specific job and your progress in rehabilitation. This varies widely but release to full duty is usually around three to four months.

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How long do I need to wear my knee brace?

The purpose of the brace is to protect the ACL repair. It must be worn at all times except when performing therapy exercises, icing and showering until your first postoperative appointment, when it will be discussed further. Generally you can expect to be wearing a brace for four to six weeks.

How long do I need to use crutches?

Use of crutches is recommended at least until your first postop appointment where it then it can be discussed with your medical provider.

Can I remove my brace sometimes, such as when applying ice or bathing?

Yes, your brace may be removed during therapy exercises, icing and showering. You should replace the brace immediately following these activities and continue to wear at all other times (even during sleep) until it is further discussed at your postoperative appointment. The brace should remain locked in a fully straight position until further instructed.

How long do I ice my knee?

Applying ice or a cooling unit is just as important in your pain management as the medications. People who ice the most tend to have less pain and swelling, better sleep and pain control, and an easier recovery in general. You should apply ice to your knee at least 40 minutes out of every hour in the first two days following surgery, and still use it frequently and as needed in the days to follow.

When do I start physical therapy?

Typically within one week of your surgery; this appointment should be made before your surgery.

How long will I need physical therapy?

Ideally until you have reached all of the goals set by your therapist, or when mutually decided. The range is approximately three months to eight months, if it is taking awhile to gain your strength back.

ORTH-2615 457027