

Post-Operative Instructions – ACL Reconstruction

Pre-Op Check List

- Fill narcotic prescription immediately when given to you (or it will expire); do not take narcotics pre-operatively! It is for you to use post-operatively.
- Meet with representative from device the company for brace fitting and post-op cryotherapy.
- Assure you have been given your first post-op appt date by the surgical scheduling team, usually 7-10 days after surgery.
- Discontinue all aspirin products at least 7 days prior to surgery.
- The Hospital Pre-Op Staff will notify you of your arrival time the afternoon before surgery. If you are not contacted by 3:30pm the day before surgery, please call our office for final instruction at (212) 305-0622.
- Bring your brace and cryotherapy with you to the hospital on day of surgery.
- Do NOT eat or drink anything past midnight the night before surgery.
- Under no circumstances should you write anything on your operative site – this will be done by me in the pre-op holding area on the day of surgery.
- You will be given your 1st post-operative prescription from me to start Physical Therapy, with all of the guidelines for your therapist to follow, at the time you schedule surgery. **You MUST begin PT 3-4 days after surgery to prevent stiffness.**

Surgery Day

- You will be asked to arrive 2 hours before the scheduled surgery time (remember to not eat or drink anything after midnight).
- You will be admitted and meet the nursing staff, anesthesia staff, and one of my team members will most likely meet and examine you as well in the pre-op holding area.
- You will usually have your regional anesthetic placed in the pre-op regional block area.
- Your surgery will be performed and usually lasts between 1-2 hours.
- You will have your brace and cryotherapy (if you purchased it) put on either in the operating room or in the recovery room that you were fit for preoperatively.
- You will have a dressing on your knee overlying the surgical incisions. There are white “steri-strips” on the skin and these should stay on until you return to the doctor’s office.
- You will be fit for crutches in the recovery room.
- You will stay in the recovery room typically 1-3 hours depending on the duration of the spinal anesthetic.
- You need someone to pick you up at the hospital (you cannot take public transportation home!)

Post-Operative Instructions – ACL Reconstruction

Post-operative Day 1

- Do not put any creams or antibiotic agents on the wounds.
- You can shower – remove the dressing but not the steri-strip bandages. Pat dry the wounds after the shower. Put band-aids over the wounds after the shower.
- You should be actively contracting your quadriceps muscle (squeezing your thigh muscle by pushing your knee straight) – this should be done as much as you possibly can.
- You should be trying to actively raise your leg straight in the air (while sitting down or lying down) – this can be done initially with the brace on but should be done with the brace off, for example after you come out of the shower.
- The brace will stay in the “locked” position (straight) until you return to see me.
- You should sleep with a pillow under the **HEEL** (not the knee) to help with keeping the knee straight – this should be done for the entirety of the brace wear.
- You can put down as much weight as possible on your foot – unless specifically instructed not to do so if you have an additional procedure besides the ACL reconstruction (**for example, a meniscal repair, or surface cartilage procedure**).
- Use your cryotherapy as instructed to decrease swelling and diminish pain.

Post-operative Days 2-7 (1st Post-operative visit)

- Continue as above.
- You will have your 1st post-operative visit somewhere in this time period (7-10 days after surgery).
- At that visit, we will change your dressings (steri-strips), remove your stitches (if necessary) and inspect your wounds. Several small sutures are snipped at the skin level (does not hurt!).
- If you are able to perform a straight leg raise we will allow you to start unlocking the brace for walking. This is important because it typically means you’ll be able to get off the crutches sooner.
- You will still sleep with your brace locked in extension for a total of 4 weeks after surgery.
- We will review your arthroscopic photos to show you what was done at your surgery.

Post-operative Weeks 1-6 (2nd Post-operative visit between 4-6 wks post-op)

- You will sleep with the brace locked in extension for 4 weeks.
- You can typically stop using the crutches between 2-4 weeks post-operatively.
- You can stop using the brace after 4 weeks post-operatively.
- **You will have xrays taken of your knee at the 2nd post-operative visit so make sure you arrive 1 hour prior to the scheduled appointment time.**

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

- **When can I remove the brace?**
You can take the brace off for showering on post op day 1 and to do your exercises with physical therapy. However, you must wear the brace at all other times until your first post-operative follow-up visit, at which time we will discuss this further.
- **When can I begin driving?**
Typically, you will be able to resume driving ~2-4 weeks post-operatively depending on how quickly you heal after surgery.
- **When can I return to work?**
This really depends on the individual patient specifically with respect to job demands (labor vs desk job). Some patients return to work as soon as 4-7 days post-operatively and others require extensive time away from work if “limited duty” is not available.
- **How long will I have Physical Therapy after the surgery?**
The typical therapy program will be a minimum of 6 months. The 1st phase of therapy will be designed to safely regain your range of motion while the 2nd phase of therapy will be directed at regaining function, strength, and endurance.
- **How much pain will I have?**
This is variable, of course, but we provide you with an appropriate amount of narcotic pills to keep you comfortable until your 1st post-operative visit. Remember that most of our patients have regional anesthesia and it is not unusual to have numbness and tingling that can be present for several days following your surgery.
- **Why is my knee “leaking”?**
Remember that arthroscopy is performed by pumping in a lot of fluid into the knee and this fluid then escapes through the small incisions (portals) – this is entirely normal to occur after surgery.
- **When should I call the office with concerns?**
Any signs of infection should be reported immediately – these include increased drainage (usually thick, cloudy, not liquid secondary to the arthroscopy), redness, increased warmth, and fevers (T > 101.8).