

Advice and exercises after anterior cruciate ligament surgery to your knee

Department of Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: October 2023

Next review: October 2026

Leaflet number: 936 Version: 2

Introduction

This booklet provides guidance for your recovery after anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction (ACLR) surgery.

You would be expected to go home on the day of your surgery. You will be provided with pain medication if needed before you go home. The ward physiotherapist will make sure you are safe walking, and on stairs, with crutches. They will also provide early exercises which you will need to do regularly to help you slowly get back the movement and muscle strength in your knee.

If you have severe pain, redness or excessive swelling in your knee, calf or groin, in the days after your operation, contact your GP or phone 111 immediately.

When you are discharged home

After your operation it is normal to have some pain. The following should help:

- Make sure you take **pain relief** as advised by ward staff before discharge.
- **Ice** placed in a plastic bag, wrapped in a towel and applied to the knee for 15 to 20 minutes several times a day will reduce post-operative pain and swelling.
- **Elevation** with support behind the knee, and raising your leg up above the level of your heart will reduce swelling.
- **Walking and physiotherapy exercises** little and often will reduce pain, swelling, decrease knee stiffness and will gradually increase your walking distance and confidence.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

How much weight can I put on my operated leg?

You can fully weight bear on your leg immediately after surgery. Occasionally your consultant may instruct you to put only partial weight on your leg for a short while after surgery. Using crutches will prevent pain associated with walking in the first few weeks.

Unless told otherwise, you can progress from 2 to 1 and then to no crutches, as long as you have good knee muscle control, don't experience too much pain and you can walk without limping.

Using stairs

The ward physiotherapist will show you how to safely do stairs using crutches before leaving hospital. After a short time you will be able to do stairs normally as you improve.



To climb up stairs:

First take a step up with your non-operated leg.

Then take a step up with your operated leg.

Finally bring your crutches up on the step, level with your 2 legs.

Always go up one step at a time.



To come down stairs:

First put your crutch one step down.

Then step down level with your crutch with your operated leg.

Finally step down with your non-operated leg, level with the crutch and operated leg.

Always go down one step at a time.

Instructions for after surgery

- **Sleep** - there are no precautions regarding sleep after surgery. Putting a pillow under your knee may provide support initially but can cause some increase in knee stiffness. It is normal to wake more often during the night in the days following surgery. When this happens gently bend your knee or get up and move around for a short while
- **Driving** can recommence when you have regained knee muscle control, at between 2 to 4 weeks, and once you can do an emergency stop and have full control of the vehicle.
- **Returning to work** depends on the demands of your job. People in office work will generally be back to work sooner than if your job is more physical. In this case you may need to return to lighter duties and/ or shorter hours at the beginning.
- **Returning to sport** and exercise depends on which sport, your individual progress and your fitness. Gym exercise will commence soon after surgery and is an important part of your recovery. Your physiotherapist will advise you how to progress safely. Sports involving greater knee stresses e.g. football is likely to be around 9 to 12 months.

Your recovery

This is extremely important if you are to achieve the best result from your operation. It is your responsibility to do your exercises as advised by the physiotherapist. If you do have any difficulties or worries please talk about them with your physiotherapist.

You are advised to complete the physiotherapy exercises and walk little and often in the days after surgery. Until you are told by the physiotherapist, do not try to do any other activity e.g. swimming/ cycling. You should have your first physiotherapy appointment between 2 to 3 weeks after surgery, and will involve several one-to-one sessions.

The aim of physiotherapy is to:

- first, get back the full range in your operated knee.
- then to get back strength in the operated leg muscles.
- increase your exercise and activity with task based goals over the months after surgery e.g. walking without crutches, going up/ down stairs normally.
- help you to achieve your overall goal of returning to your pre-injury function/ sport or activity.

Note - patient's recovery after surgery varies greatly. Your physiotherapist will tailor the exercises to your ability and you will work through them as your individual ability allows.

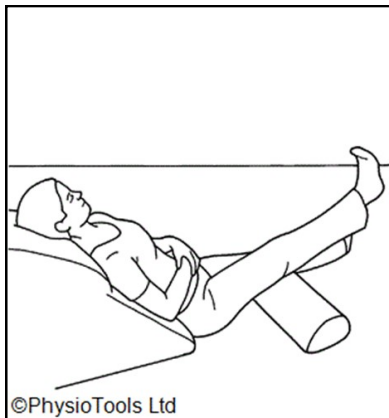
First exercises

The aim of these exercises is to:

- get back the movement of your knee; to be able to bend and straighten your knee fully.
- get back the strength in your operated leg muscles.

Complete the exercises several times a day; little and often is best in the days after surgery.

It is normal to feel some aching, stretching or discomfort during the exercises, and for up to 30 minutes after stopping. If there is big increase in pain you should reduce the frequency, and number of repetitions and talk to the physiotherapist at your first appointment.



Exercise 1

Sit with your legs up on your bed / settee. Place a pillow under your operated kneed. Place a rolled towel/wedge under your knee.

Bend your ankle, straighten the knee and push it down against the towel. Then lift your leg 1 cm off the towel.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Return to starting position.

Repeat 10 to 15 times.



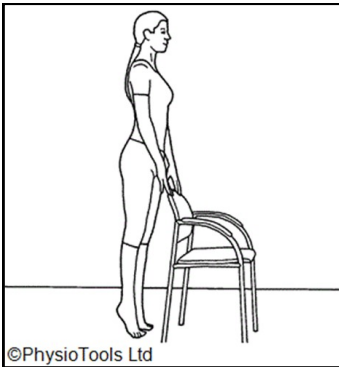
Exercise 2

Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor. Bend your knee as much as possible.

Cross your legs at the ankle with the non-operated leg on top and push your operated leg back to bend the knee more.

Hold for 5 to 10 seconds.

Repeat 10 to 15 times.

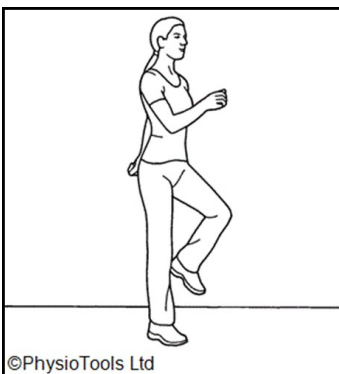


Exercise 3

Stand. Push up onto your toes. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Lower down.

When this becomes easy, try this exercise whilst standing only on your operated leg.

Repeat 10 to 20 times.

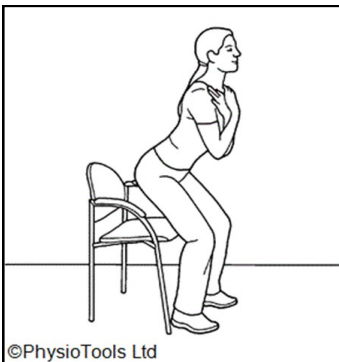


Exercise 4

Practise marching on the spot to develop your normal walking pattern and strength.

Aim to do this for 30 seconds.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

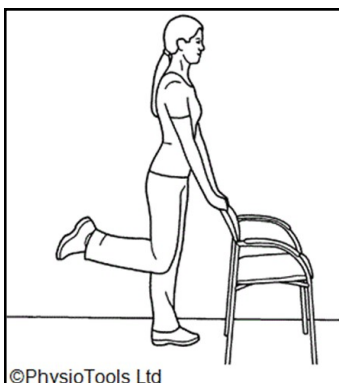


Exercise 5

Sitting with your arms crossed.

Stand up from and sit down slowly onto a chair (this can be made easier and more difficult by changing the height of the chair).

Repeat 10 times. 2 to 3 sets.



Exercise 6

Stand. Hold onto a support and bring one leg slightly backwards. Bend your knee and lift your foot off the floor.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Key points to remember

- An increase in pain and swelling especially towards the end of the day, shows you are overdoing your exercises and walking. If this happens, apply ice as advised, and reduce your activity.
- Doing too little exercise/ walking will delay your progress. Be advised by the ward physiotherapist before leaving hospital what level of activity should be done each day.
- If you have any severe pain, redness and swelling in your groin or calf of the operated leg either contact your GP or phone 111 for advice.
- Try to get a good nights sleep; this is very important for your recovery.
- Take pain relief if needed; you should only need this for a short while after your surgery. It is better to take short-term pain relief, which allows you to take part in your physiotherapy exercises, than to be in too much pain that you are prevented from doing so.
- Try to complete your exercises and walking little and often after surgery. You can increase your walking distance slowly in the days after surgery as pain allows.
- Only do the physiotherapy exercises and walking until you are advised you can start other forms of exercise by your physiotherapist e.g. swimming/ cycling.

Contact details

Physiotherapy Departments:

Glenfield Hospital:	0116 258 3595
Leicester General Hospital:	0116 258 4070
Leicester Royal Infirmary:	0116 258 5816

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