

Protect the Pivot: Avoiding ACL injuries

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Summer sports are running at full speed, and with them come potentially career-changing injuries.

A tear or sprain of the anterior cruciate ligament, or ACL, is one of the more common knee injuries in high-demand sports like football and soccer.

Keith Corpus, MD, is an orthopedic sports medicine surgeon with OSF HealthCare and Great Plains Orthopaedics. He says while the outpatient visit to fix your ACL may only take a day, the recovery time is much longer.

“It’s at least a nine month recovery process to get you back to full sports,” Dr. Corpus says. “There’s protocol we progress through. We have to get your motion back then we have to get your strength back. Then we have to get you back running, which is normally around the four or five-month time point.”

After this, patients will use crutches and wear a brace to protect the knee.

“As we progress you into higher-level athletics at the six-month time point, we transition you typically to a smaller brace that you can wear while you’re playing. Then full return to sports is, at earliest, 9 months,” Dr. Corpus says.

Dr. Corpus says ACL injuries normally happen in sports with sharp changes in direction.

“It’s really common in cutting and pivoting sports,” Dr. Corpus says. “You’ll put your foot in the ground and then turn, and your ACL can tear. It can obviously cause things like pain, but it can also cause prolonged instability and other damage to your knee.”

In the young athletic population, Dr. Corpus says the ACL almost always has to be fixed.

“There are certain populations as we age that we don’t fix them. But in our younger athletes playing contact sports, we fix them to try and prevent things from happening down the line if your knee becomes increasingly unstable,” Dr. Corpus says. “It’s certainly surgery. We basically try to make you a new ACL.”

While the circumstances of an ACL tear are often not avoidable, Dr. Corpus says there are some proactive steps you can take to protect your knee as a whole.

“Having proper mechanics when you’re cutting, pivoting or landing are important. There are strategies we can have to try and limit those,” Dr. Corpus says.

Another tip: Take your time and don't rush into things.

"Work up into things. If you're transitioning from one sport to another, or if you've been inactive for the winter and now you're ramping up into things, make sure you're doing so in a slow and deliberate manner," Dr. Corpus says.

Dr. Corpus says ACL injuries are very common during the summer months with a lot of kids playing football and soccer. OSF HealthCare has orthopedic surgeons and sports medicine doctors available to evaluate you after an injury, and work through a treatment plan to get you back in action. You can find providers and locations here (<https://www.osfhealthcare.org/orthopedics/providers/orthopedics/>)