

**Post-Operative ACL Surgery  
Common Questions  
Dr. Stetson**

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**More information can be found on  
Dr. Stetson's website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com)**

**Introduction**

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to do your surgery. My staff and I will do everything we can to ensure your comfort and safety during your surgery. Please read over these simple instructions prior to your surgery so that you are well prepared the day of your surgery

**I am a little nervous before my ACL surgery, is that common?**



It is not unusual to feel a little nervous before your surgery. Please be assured that all of the doctors and nurses and assistants have many years of experience and will take very good care of you.

**What should I do the night before my surgery?**

The night before your surgery go to bed early and get plenty of rest. Avoid any alcoholic beverages as it may sometimes interfere with the anesthetic agents or drugs used during your surgery and slow their metabolism.

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**What should I eat the night before my surgery?**

The night before your surgery, there are no restrictions on what you should eat. However, most anesthesiologists recommend avoiding any spicy foods the night before your surgery. It is very important that you have nothing to eat after midnight the night before your surgery. If there is food in your stomach the morning of your surgery, it could be a reason to cancel your surgery as this can cause problems with general anesthesia.



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**What about my regular medications, can I take them?**



Continue taking your current medications. The morning of your surgery, it is fine to take your regularly prescribed medications with a sip of water. However, if you are taking any aspirin or anti-inflammatory medications, please stop taking them 5 days before your surgery. If you are on blood thinners such as Coumadin or Xarelto, please consult with your regular doctor before stopping them.

**What about my supplements, can I take them?**

Please stop all supplements 5 days before your surgery. Some of these supplements may have a blood thinning effect and may increase bleeding at the time of surgery.

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**What should I wear the morning of my ACL surgery?**



The morning of your surgery, wear loose, comfortable clothing that is easy to take on and off. Shorts are a good idea as these are the same things you will be putting on after your surgery and you will be going home with a brace on your knee.

**Can I drive myself home after my surgery?**



No. The effects of anesthesia can take 24 hours to wear off and so you are not allowed to drive yourself home after ACL surgery. We recommend that a friend or family member accompany you the day of surgery to take you home after the procedure. We also recommend that someone is with you the first night after surgery.

**What bandage or dressing will I have on my knee after surgery?**



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After surgery, you will wake up with a big, white stocking on your knee which goes from your ankle to your thigh and helps reduce swelling. The dressing should be kept on until your first post-operative visit. After your post-operative visit, an ACE wrap will be placed around your knee. This ACE wrap should be worn for the first 2 weeks after surgery to help reduce swelling.

The ACE wrap can help reduce swelling but can be discontinued 2 weeks after your first post-operative visit. It is very important not to wear any sort of neoprene knee sleeve for 6 weeks after surgery as these neoprene knee sleeves can harbor bacteria and infect the surgical wounds. We recommend a REPAREL ([www.reparel.com](http://www.reparel.com)) non-compressive knee sleeve for the next 6 weeks after the ACE wrap has been discontinued and then as needed after that. The REPAREL knee sleeve is designed to promote the resolution of the inflammatory response without utilizing the mechanical “squeeze” typical of compression garments. The fabric is soft and breathable and is a much better option for reducing pain and resolving inflammation after surgery than a standard neoprene knee sleeve. The REPAREL knee sleeve is not covered by insurance, but is available in our office for a discounted cash price.

**What about the surgical incisions after my ACL surgery?**



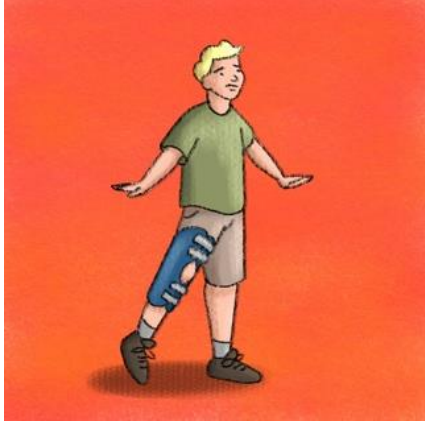
Arthroscopic ACL knee surgery is done with two small incisions on either side of the knee cap, each about a quarter inch in length and typically one small incision about two inches long on the inside part of your lower knee. At your first post-operative visit, we will check the incisions to make sure they are healing proper. We will then replace the paper strips or steri-strips with new ones to keep the incisions closed. These steri-strips over the incisions will fall off or they can be removed approximately ten to fourteen days after your surgery.

**What about a brace after ACL surgery?**

After ACL knee surgery, a knee brace is necessary to help you walk and to protect your new ligament. You will go home with a brace or what is called a knee immobilizer around your knee. Please keep the brace on until your first post-operative visit. It is okay to loosen the straps on the brace if it becomes too tight and also loosen it to place the ice packs or cold compression device around your knee. At two weeks following surgery, we will see you back in our office and will

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discontinue the knee immobilizer at that time and fit you for a brace with hinges which allows you to bend your knee while you walk.



**Can I take a shower or bath after my surgery?**

It is important to keep the surgical site clean and dry after your surgery. Once the post-operative dressing is removed, it is acceptable to shower. We recommend that plastic wrap such as saran wrap be wrapped around the knee when showering for the first 10 days after surgery to protect the incisions from getting wet. Once the incisions are completely healed, you may get the knee wet in the shower. If the strips are still in place, they will begin peeling off, at which time you may remove them completely. Please wait four weeks or until the incisions are completely healed before completely submerging the knee in water such as using a bathtub, pool, or Jacuzzi.

**What if I have bleeding after my ACL surgery?**

In some cases, oozing from the incision sites may persist for several hours. If bleeding continues or appears to be excessive, even though the dressing and compressive stocking are in place, please contact our office.

**What if I have swelling in my knee after surgery?**

It is common to experience temporary swelling around the knee joint, which can cause stiffness and discomfort. This may last for days or weeks after the surgery. To minimize the swelling, use an ice pack for approximately 15 to 20 minutes every two hours for the first 48-72 hours after surgery and then as necessary to reduce swelling. It is also helpful to elevate the leg on 1 to 2 pillows while sitting or lying down and to keep the compressive stocking in place.

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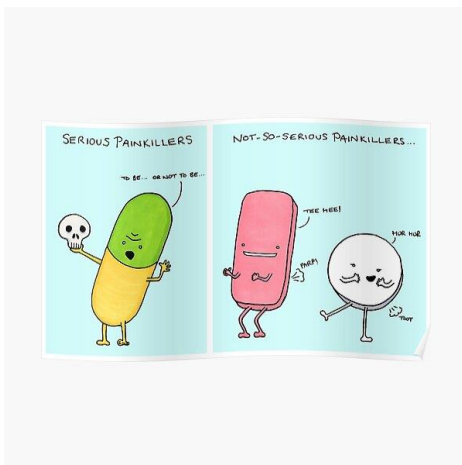
**What about icing after my knee surgery?**

After the surgery, it is advised that you put an ice pack on the front and back of the knee for 15 to 20 minutes, every 2 to 3 hours while awake. We also recommend a special ice cooling unit that is available through one of the companies we work with. Your insurance may or may not pay for it. They will be contacting you and you can determine if this works within your budget. Although you might not feel the full effects of the icing because of the large bandage on your knee, if you place the ice or cooling unit in the front and back of your knee, it will work and help reduce swelling. Please do not remove the post-operative dressing yourself but wait for your first post-operative visit.

**What can I eat after my surgery?**

Following your surgery drink lots of liquids and eat somewhat bland, nutritious foods for the first 24 to 48 hours. Progress to your usual diet as tolerated. Remember that an adequate diet is essential for the healing process.

**What do I take to help relieve the pain?**



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It is not uncommon to have some pain or mild discomfort after your surgery. For mild pain, we recommend that you take an over-the-counter or prescription dose of a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen or naproxen as needed. For moderate to severe pain, a prescription for a narcotic medication such as hydrocodone or Vicodin or a similar medication will be provided to you prior to surgery. Take 1 to 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours as needed, not to exceed two tablets within four hours. Do not take the medication on an empty stomach and do not drink alcohol while using the prescription pain medication. If you should experience any untoward side effects, please stop the medication and contact our office. These medications may make you constipated so you may want to take a stool softener with them. Do not drive or operate any machinery while taking these narcotic medications.

**What if I have nausea or vomiting after surgery?**

Although this is unusual, both nausea and or vomiting can be experienced after anesthesia. The pain medications given during surgery can do this and also the prescription narcotic medication may also cause nausea and vomiting. It is important to take the pain medications with food in your stomach. If you have a known tendency for either nausea or vomiting, please discuss it with the anesthesiologist, prior to your surgery. If this continues for several hours after surgery, please contact our office.

**What if I feel drowsy or sleepy after surgery?**

After general anesthesia, drowsiness may persist for several hours after surgery. It generally should not be a cause for concern and usually wears off within 24 hours after surgery.

**Can I walk on my knee after surgery?**

Yes, you can put weight on your leg after your ACL surgery as long as you wear your brace. You will be provided with crutches after surgery which are for your support and comfort. Unless specifically instructed otherwise, you may discontinue their use as soon as you are comfortable walking without them as long as you continue to wear the brace. Most people get rid of their crutches within the first 10 to 14 days after ACL surgery.

**What exercises should I do after surgery?**

After ACL surgery, it is important to start waking up the muscles surrounding your knee. It is ok to remove your knee brace to do these exercises. Start by doing straight leg lift exercises by lifting the leg with the knee straight while lying down. Do this ten times at least 3 to 4 times per day. In addition, do the alphabet with your toes 3 to 5 times per day. Let pain be your guide in regard to how much walking and exercise you do. During the first 7-10 days, the goal is to decrease swelling, increase comfort, increase range of motion, and begin strengthening. It is acceptable to gently start bending and straightening your knee as you feel comfortable.

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**When do I come back after surgery?**

A post-operative appointment will be scheduled to return to the office within 2 to 4 days after your surgery. The dressing will be removed and the wounds are checked. After that, you will return again in two weeks so the wound can be checked and to also change the knee immobilizer brace to a hinged knee brace. You will then return four weeks later where the brace is most often discontinued. Following that, most patients return every 6 to 8 weeks for routine post-operative visits until they have made a complete recovery.

**When do I start physical therapy after surgery?**



On your first post-operative visit, you will be given a prescription for physical therapy and you can start within 7-10 days after your surgery. Physical therapy is typically done twice per week

for six weeks. During this time, the therapist will help you regain motion and then strength in your knee. Most patients will continue to do physical therapy for two to three months after surgery.



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**What about blood clots after surgery?**

Blood clots or what are referred to as deep venous thrombosis are rare after knee surgery but can occur after any surgery. It is recommended that you start to do simple ankle exercises the day after the surgery. These are referred to as “ankle pumps where you flex and extend your ankle up and down”. It is recommended that you do 3 sets of 10, three times per day for a total of 90 for the first six weeks after your surgery. This helps circulate the blood from your leg back up into the heart.

**Should I take any medications to prevent blood clots?**



It is recommended that starting on the first day after your surgery, you take one baby aspirin tablet of 81 milligrams per day for the first 6 weeks after your surgery. If this is a problem for whatever reason including if you have an allergic reaction to aspirin, please let us know. If you are taking blood thinners for another condition, or your regular doctor recommends you not to take aspirin, please discuss this with us before surgery.

**What if my knee starts to click, feels squishy or loose after surgery?**

It is not uncommon to feel liquid within the knee as a result of the surgical procedure. In most cases, the body reabsorbs all of the fluid. Also, occasional clicking with movement may occur as a result of the muscle that supports the knee as it is readjusting. These symptoms may be alleviated over the course of time, and by doing strengthening exercises.

**How do I know what was done during my surgery?**

As a courtesy and an educational tool, the arthroscopic portion of your knee surgery is recorded and the findings are explained during surgery. You will be given a CD after your procedure is completed and you are encouraged you to watch the video clips before your first post-operative visit. The CD does not play on a MAC computer. If you do not have a CD or a DVD player, please bring a memory stick the day of your surgery and the video clips can be uploaded onto your memory stick.

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**What about flying after surgery?**

We recommend that you avoid flying for 2 weeks post-operatively. Flying can increase the risk of blood clots right after your surgery.

**Is Dr. Stetson a knee specialist?**

Yes, Dr. Stetson is a knee specialist and he is fellowship trained in sports medicine which includes arthroscopic knee ACL surgery. He has over 25 years of experience in arthroscopic knee surgery and sports medicine. He is a picture of one of his patients, United States Olympic Volleyball Player Christa Harmatto (#13) at the 2012 London Olympics. Dr. Stetson is one of the team physicians for the US Olympic Volleyball Teams!



**What if I have any other questions?**

If you have any other questions, please give us a call in our office at (818) 848-3030. Please visit my website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com) or [www.stetsonleeortho.com](http://www.stetsonleeortho.com) for more information about the details of arthroscopic knee surgery. If there are non-urgent questions, you can email my assistant Suzie at [suzie@stetsonleeortho.com](mailto:suzie@stetsonleeortho.com).

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Finally, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to do your surgery. My staff and I will do everything we can to ensure your comfort and safety during your surgery, and to make sure you have a quick recovery.

William B. Stetson, M.D.

Stetson Lee Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine

Associate Clinical Professor

USC Department of Orthopedic Surgery

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