ACL Injuries

Definition
An anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury is the over-stretching or tearing of the anterior cruciate ligament in the knee. A tear can be either partial or complete.

Causes
ACL tears can be due to contact or non-contact injuries. A blow to the side of the knee, which can occur during a football tackle, might result in an ACL tear. Coming to a quick stop — combined with a direction change while running, pivoting, landing from a jump or hyperextending the knee joint — also can cause injury to the ACL. Basketball, football, soccer and skiing are common causes of ACL tears.

Early Symptoms
• A “popping” sound at the time of injury
• Knee swelling within six hours of injury
• Pain, especially when you try to put weight on the injured knee

Those with only a mild ACL injury may notice that the knee feels unstable or seems to “give way” when using it.

First Aid
An ACL injury should be treated by:
• Taking weight off of the injured leg
• Elevating the joint (above the level of the heart)
• Applying ice
• Taking pain-relievers such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (i.e. ibuprofen)

Do NOT play again until you have been evaluated and treated. Some people might need crutches to walk until the swelling and pain have subsided. For mild injuries, your doctor might suggest physical therapy to help you regain joint motion and leg strength. They might also recommend surgery to rebuild the ACL. The old ligament cannot be fixed, so a new one needs to be constructed.

Do Not
• Try to move the joint, in case of a serious knee injury. Use a splint to keep the knee straight until a trained medical professional has evaluated it.
• Return to play until you have been evaluated and treated.

When to Contact a Medical Professional
Anyone with a serious knee injury should seek medical attention for X-rays and evaluation. If the foot is cool and blue after a knee injury, the knee might be dislocated and blood vessels to the foot might be injured. This is a true medical emergency that requires immediate professional help.
The AMITA Health Orthopedics Institute is a national leader in musculoskeletal care, offering comprehensive and advanced care for a wide range of conditions. We are proactive about keeping you active. That is why our multi-disciplinary orthopedic teams enlist a comprehensive leading edge approach to the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal injuries.

Our team of highly-experienced board-certified physicians, surgeons, therapists and nurses are dedicated to providing patients of all ages with a personalized treatment program that is customized for your condition, lifestyle and personal preferences.

We work hard to prevent sports-related injuries, which have become increasingly more common among athletes, especially children. AMITA Health Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons keep kids active and participating in the extracurricular activities they enjoy by delivering educational programs and support for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic care.

For more information, or to contact one of our Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons, email us at SportsMedicine@AMITAhealth.org or call us at 224.273.2416