

# ACL injuries

A parent's guide to signs, symptoms, treatment, and prevention.



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

## Causes

ACL tears may be due to contact or noncontact injuries. A blow to the side of the knee, which can occur during a football tackle, may result in an ACL tear. Coming to a quick stop, combined with a direction change while running, pivoting, landing from a jump, or overextending the knee joint (called hyperextension), also can cause injury to the ACL. Basketball, football, soccer, and skiing are sports which have a high rate of ACL tears.

## Symptoms

- A “popping” sensation or sound at the time of injury
- Knee swelling, within six hours of injury, especially into the calf
- Pain when putting weight on the injured leg

Those who have an ACL injury may notice that the knee feels unstable or seems to “give way” when walking.

## First aid

- Take weight off of the injured limb.
- Elevate the joint (above the level of the heart).
- Ice the joint.
- Take pain relievers such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (like ibuprofen).

DO NOT play again until you have been evaluated and treated. Some people may need crutches to walk until the swelling and pain have improved. For mild injuries, your doctor may suggest physical therapy in combination with a brace to help you regain joint motion and leg strength. For more severe injuries your doctor may recommend surgery to reconstruct the ACL. The typical recovery timeframe is around six months.

## Do nots

- In the case of a serious knee injury, do NOT try to move the joint. Use a splint to keep the knee straight until a trained medical professional has evaluated it.
- Do NOT return to play until you have been evaluated and treated.

## When to contact a 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 may be dislocated, and blood vessels to the foot may be injured. This is a true medical emergency that requires immediate professional help.



● **SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital**  
1465 South Grand Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63104



● **SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Pediatrics Specialty Services SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital**  
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Lake Saint Louis, MO 63367



● **SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Pediatrics Specialty Services South County**  
13000 Butler Crest Dr.  
St. Louis, MO 63128



● **SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Pediatrics Specialty Services North County**  
3878 Pershall Road  
Ferguson, MO 63135



● **SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Pediatrics Specialty Services Anderson Ambulatory Surgery Center**  
3403 Anderson HealthCare Dr.  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

## SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes.

Specialists your child has access to include adolescent medicine physicians, cardiologists, emergency medicine physicians, neurologists, nutritionists, orthopedists, pediatric psychologists, physical therapists, pulmonologists, radiologists, and rehabilitation specialists. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and supports for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call or text us **24/7 at 314-577-5640**.

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital providers, **24 hours a day in the ER at:** SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, DePaul Hospital, St. Clare Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital-St. Charles, St. Joseph Hospital-Lake St. Louis, Anderson Hospital, and HSHS St. Elizabeth Hospital.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, SSM Health ministries implemented enhanced safety measures, which are evaluated periodically based on COVID-19 transmission numbers. To ensure your protection and that of others, we continue to require face masks upon entry along with ministry-specific screening processes.