

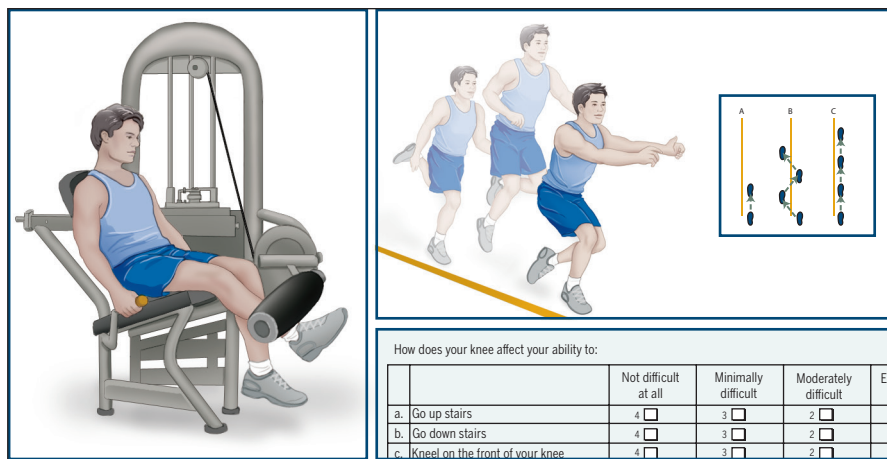
Return to Sport

When to Resume Full Activity After an ACL Surgery

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Although surgery to fix a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) is common, knowing when it is safe to return to activities and sports after ACL reconstruction is not always clear. Following surgery, patients participate in a progressive rehabilitation program with the goal of resuming their activities and sports. As part of their rehabilitation, patients often fill out surveys,

such as the International Knee Documentation Committee (IKDC) survey, that ask questions about how patients think they are recovering. It is not clear, though, how well these surveys truly predict an athlete's readiness to get back to activities and sports. A study published in the December 2014 issue of *JOSPT* provides new insight and evidence-based tools to help answer this question.



SURVEY AND FUNCTIONAL TESTS. When is it safe to return to activities and sports after an ACL injury, surgery, and rehabilitation? Oftentimes, surveys, strength tests, and functional hop tests are used to identify those athletes who are ready to get back to their activities and sports. The evidence shows that athletes should be able to jump, and their reconstructed knees should be at least 90% as strong as their uninjured leg. If an athlete completes the IKDC survey and scores poorly, he or she is probably not ready to resume activities. Further, if the athlete scores well on the IKDC survey, he or she should also pass the strength and functional hop tests before returning to activities and sports.

This Perspectives article was written by a team of *JOSPT*'s editorial board and staff, with Deydre S. Teyhen, PT, PhD, Editor, and Jeanne Robertson, Illustrator.

This *JOSPT* Perspectives for Patients is based on an article by Logerstedt et al, titled "Self-Reported Knee Function Can Identify Athletes Who Fail Return-to-Activity Criteria up to 1 Year After Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction: A Delaware-Oslo ACL Cohort Study," *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther 2014;44(12):914-923. Epub 27 October 2014. doi:10.2519/jospt.2014.4852*

NEW INSIGHTS

The researchers who conducted this study tested more than 140 level I and II athletes, ranging in age from 13 to 56 years, at 6 and 12 months after ACL surgery. All athletes completed the IKDC survey; they were also tested for thigh strength and ability to hop (see illustration). Athletes were considered "ready to return to activity" if they passed each of the strength and hop tests. These results were then compared to their survey responses. The researchers found that 91% of all athletes who scored poorly on the 6-month survey also failed the functional tests. Further, only 48% of athletes who scored well on the 6-month survey actually passed the functional tests. The researchers found similar results at 12 months.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Athletes who scored poorly on the IKDC survey were over 4 times more likely to fail the functional tests. These athletes clearly were not ready to return to activities and sports. However, for the athletes who scored well on the IKDC survey, nearly 50% overestimated their recovery. Therefore, good IKDC survey scores did not necessarily mean the athletes would pass the strength and functional tests. The evidence indicates that the decision to return to activities and sports cannot be made based on the survey results alone. The bottom line is that strength and functional testing should be part of the return-to-activity and return-to-sport criteria because some athletes tend to misjudge their recovery when filling out a survey. For more information on rehabilitation following ACL surgery, contact your physical therapist specializing in musculoskeletal disorders.

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