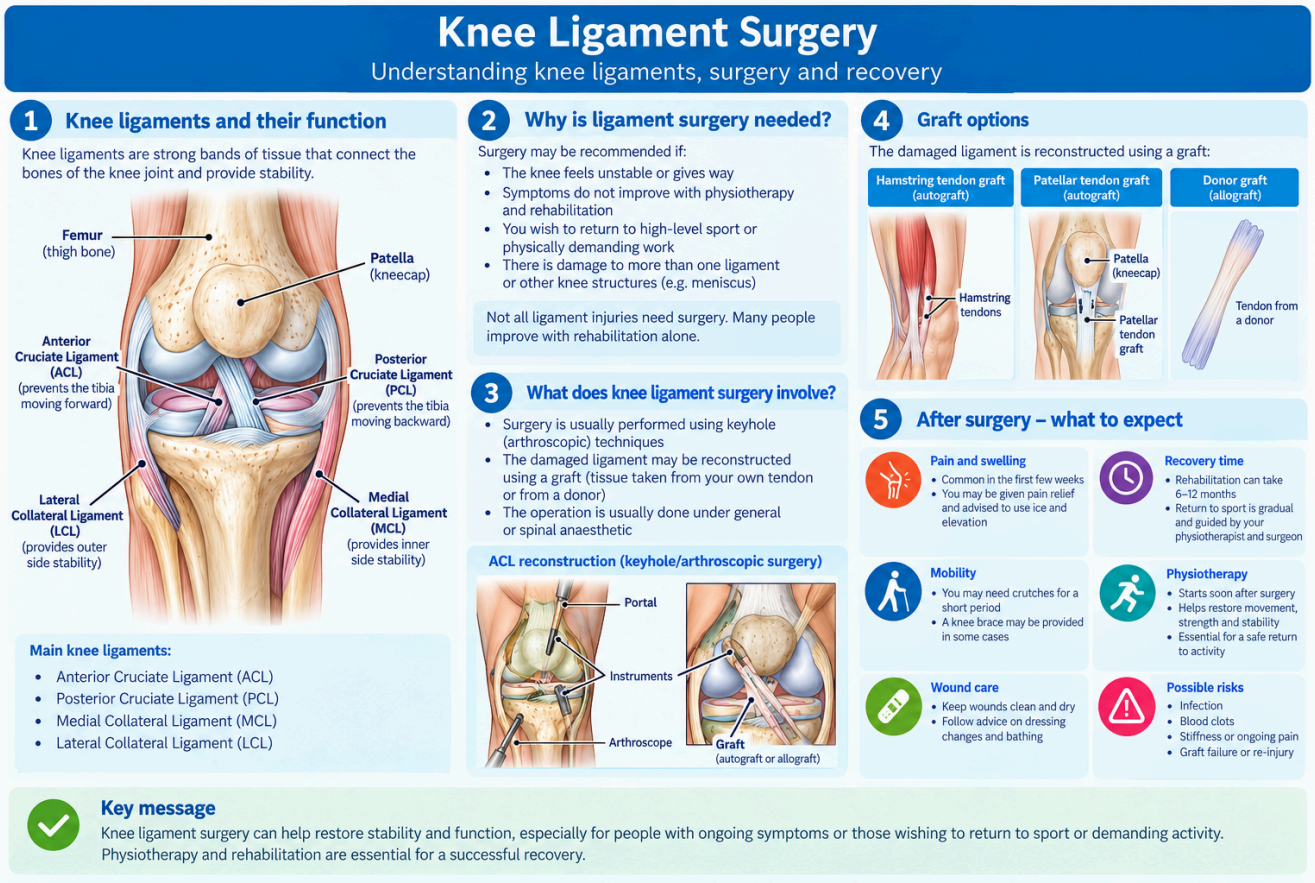
Knee Ligament Surgery

Understanding surgery, rehabilitation and recovery

Knee Ligament Surgery

A guide to procedures, recovery and rehabilitation



What are knee ligaments?

Knee ligaments connect the bones of the knee and help keep the joint stable. The four main ligaments are the ACL, PCL, MCL and LCL. They support movement and stability.

About this leaflet

This guide explains knee ligament surgery and what to expect during recovery. Your surgeon or physiotherapist may give you specific advice based on your individual condition.

Why surgery may be needed

Understanding your options and the procedure

Why might surgery be recommended?

Surgery may be advised when the knee repeatedly gives way, symptoms persist despite rehabilitation, or the injury involves several ligaments or other structures such as the meniscus.

Returning to demanding activities

Surgery may be considered for people aiming to return to high-level sport or physically demanding work, depending on the injury and personal goals.

Not every injury needs surgery

Many knee ligament injuries improve with physiotherapy and a structured rehabilitation programme without an operation.

What does the operation involve?

Knee ligament surgery often uses keyhole (arthroscopic) techniques. A torn ligament may be reconstructed using a tendon graft from your own body or a donor.

Anaesthetic and surgical planning

The procedure is usually performed under a general or spinal anaesthetic. Your surgeon will explain which ligament is being treated, the graft choice and the expected recovery.

Preparing for recovery

Discuss work, transport, crutches, bracing, wound care and your rehabilitation plan with your surgical team before the operation.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Movement and strength under physiotherapy guidance

Knee ligament rehabilitation exercises

Follow your surgeon or physiotherapist's rehabilitation plan. The exercises below are examples; timing and progression vary by procedure.

Knee Ligament Surgery – Exercise Examples

Gentle exercises to help restore movement, strength and stability after knee ligament surgery

1 Heel slide



- Lie on your back with one leg straight and the other bent.
- Slide your heel towards your buttock, keeping your heel on the floor.
- Go as far as comfortable, then slowly straighten your leg.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

2 Quad sets



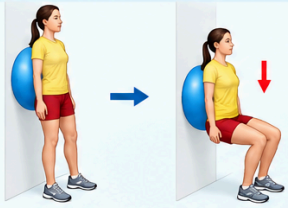
- Lie on your back with one leg straight and the other bent.
- Press the back of your straight knee down into the towel, tightening your thigh muscle.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds.
- Repeat 10–15 times, each leg.

3 Passive knee extension



- Lie on your back with a small rolled towel under your heel.
- Allow your knee to gently straighten and relax.
- Stay in this position for 1–2 minutes.
- Repeat 3–5 times, each leg.

4 Wall squat with a ball



- Stand with your back against a wall with a soft ball between your back and the wall.
- Slide down into a small squat (about 30–45°).
- Keep your knees in line with your toes.
- Hold for 5–10 seconds.
- Repeat 8–12 times.

5 Balance and reach exercise A



- Stand behind a chair for support.
- Stand on one leg and gently reach forward with the opposite arm.
- Keep your hips level and your knee slightly bent.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 8–12 times, each leg.

6 Balance and reach exercise B



- Stand to the side of a chair for support.
- Stand on one leg and gently reach forward with the opposite arm.
- Move the other leg out to the side or slightly back.
- Keep your hips level and balanced.
- Repeat 8–12 times, each leg.

Progressing safely

Start only the exercises approved for your stage of recovery. Avoid forcing painful movements, and follow any restrictions on weight-bearing or knee bending. Seek advice if pain or swelling increases.

Treatment, recovery and next steps

Practical advice after knee ligament surgery

1. Pain, swelling and mobility

Pain and swelling are common initially. Use prescribed pain relief, ice and elevation as advised. You may need crutches or a brace.

2. Wound care

Keep wounds clean and dry and follow the surgical team's instructions about dressings, washing and follow-up.

3. Physiotherapy and rehabilitation

Physiotherapy helps restore movement, strength, balance and knee control. Rehabilitation may take 6–12 months, depending on the ligament and your goals.

4. Returning to work and sport

Desk work may be possible within weeks; physical work may take months. Return to sport must be gradual and guided by your surgeon and physiotherapist.

5. Risks and complications

Risks include infection, blood clots, stiffness, ongoing pain or re-injury.

When to seek medical advice

Contact your surgical team for increasing pain, redness, swelling, fever, wound discharge or repeated giving way. Sudden shortness of breath requires emergency help; sudden calf pain needs urgent assessment.

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