

Get Prepared

Objective

Here is a list of tips gathered from former ACL patients about how to prepare your body, mind, home, and plans for surgery.

Tips for Conquering ACL Surgery and Rehabilitation: What You Can Do Before Surgery

Prepare Your Body

- ❖ Give your affected and unaffected legs a head start—do the preoperative exercises and activities (“prehab”) you are advised to do.
- ❖ Nourish your body with healthy food in the weeks before surgery.
- ❖ Eliminate or reduce smoking and alcohol consumption, both of which may hamper recovery.
- ❖ Wean yourself off caffeine the week before surgery to avoid caffeine withdrawal headaches on the day of surgery.
- ❖ Do personal care behaviors that you might not easily be able to do for a short time after surgery, such as getting a haircut, trimming your beard, shaving/waxing your legs, and clipping your fingernails and toenails.

Prepare Your Mind

- ❖ Manage your stress and calm your nerves—listen to the preoperative imagery session on the this CD-ROM on a regular basis.
- ❖ Learn as much as you can about your surgery and rehabilitation so you know what to expect and can prepare accordingly.
- ❖ If you are an active person who finds emotional balance in regular, outdoor aerobic exercise, make an agreement with yourself that you will take that same energy in the early weeks of rehabilitation and invest it into all the mental and physical exercises appropriate to your stage of rehabilitation. As well, you can direct feelings of “cabin fever” for example, to exercising other parts of your body, like doing sit-ups or working the upper part of your body until you can get back to your usual form of activity.

Prepare Your Home

- ❖ If your bedroom is upstairs, make sure you have a room downstairs set up for you to live in the first couple of weeks after surgery. If this is not possible, consider picking up a second pair of crutches (one for each floor) and equip your room with a small refrigerator, a microwave oven, a

television, and other essentials so you have to take the stairs only when absolutely necessary.

- ❖ Get a table with wheels. Tie a rope to the table with a small weight on the other end. After surgery, you can load the table with food, beverages, icepacks, reading materials, and other things you might need. Throw the weighted rope to where you want the contents of the cart to go, crutch over to your intended destination, pick up the rope, and pull the table toward you.
- ❖ If you have no steps in your home, consider using a flat, square-shaped rolling dolly to sit on to maneuver around on during the first week of recovery. It is not unheard of to scoot across the floor on the seat of one's pants for very short distances to the bathroom, for example. This can help ease you into the skill of using crutches while minimizing the up and down motion of going from prone to standing in the first few days after surgery.
- ❖ Set up your home recovery area with medications, reading materials, clock, music player, television (complete with a battery-filled remote control), computer, flashlight, and other essential items.
- ❖ Have a recliner or lots of pillows available to elevate your leg after surgery. Pillows are also useful for helping you find a comfortable position when resting or sleeping.
- ❖ Strategically place footstools (or plastic milk crates with pillows on them) around the house to enable you to prop up your leg when you sit up after surgery, while icing or simply elevating your knee to reduce swelling.
- ❖ Stock up on diversions such as books, magazines, jigsaw puzzles, board games, word puzzle books, videos, video games, and CDs to help pass the time after surgery.
- ❖ Fill your freezer with microwaveable, meal-sized entrees and ice, freezable gel packs, or homemade ice packs (3 parts water, 1 part rubbing alcohol in gallon freezer bags).
- ❖ Have quick and easy foods on hand. Foods that involve minimal preparation and can be eaten out of the container are ideal.
- ❖ Set up your shower with a removable showerhead and a small bench (available at most medical supply stores), a plastic lawn chair, or even a milk crate to enhance your bathing experience. Have plastic bags and rubber bands nearby to help keep your stitches dry after surgery.
- ❖ Get an armchair frame or a portable raised-seat for the bathroom commode.
- ❖ Outfit your recovery area with items such as:
 - a back pack or fanny pack (to help you carry things when you are on crutches)
 - a cordless (or cell) phone
 - a towel (to mop up the floor if it becomes wet, slippery, and dangerous for a crutch-walking patient)
 - an athletic water bottle (to make drinking easier while lying down)
 - slip on shoes or slippers (it's tough to bend over and tie shoelaces shortly after surgery!)

- remotes for TV and/or music listening devices (including extra batteries).
- ❖ Do the household chores that you won't easily be able to do for a while after surgery, such as cleaning, vacuuming, and laundry.
- ❖ Using crutches, go through a dry run of your house, including the bathroom, to identify anything else that might make your home safer and more comfortable after your surgery.
- ❖ If your surgery is during winter in a cold climate, consider getting some studded rubber cups for your crutches. If the crutches are your own (versus rented), you can actually drill a screw or nail into the end of each crutch to achieve better gripping on ice and snow.

Make Your Plans

- ❖ Get your pain, antibiotic, and any other medication prescriptions filled before surgery if you can—you might not feel like going to the pharmacy after surgery.
- ❖ Set up your postoperative physical therapy appointments prior to surgery.
- ❖ Get everything in order with your insurance company or HMO. Make sure you have all the necessary referrals, approvals, and the like taken care of before you have surgery.
- ❖ Recruit friends and family members to visit you, help you with meal preparation, and provide you with general assistance after surgery, especially the first few days.
- ❖ Arrange for transportation to and from doctor's appointments, physical therapy, and other important engagements until you are able to drive yourself. Make sure in advance that vehicles you ride in are sufficiently roomy, have a full tank of gas, and have space for your crutches.
- ❖ Have some extra cash on hand in case you need to take a taxi or have food delivered to you after surgery.
- ❖ Get caught up on your bills before surgery in case getting to the mailbox proves challenging after surgery.
- ❖ If you rent videos for the first few days after surgery, arrange to have someone return them once you have viewed them.
- ❖ Tie-up loose ends at work/school.