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Restoring Function. Maximizing Performance.

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KNEE CONDITION

PCL Tear

Posterior Cruciate Ligament Injury — Patient Condition Guide



Posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) reconstruction · for education; your anatomy may differ

OVERVIEW

The posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) is the knee's strongest stabilizing ligament, preventing the shin bone from sliding too far backward beneath the thigh bone. PCL tears are less common than ACL tears and typically result from a direct blow to the front of the shin (a "dashboard injury") or a hard fall onto a bent knee.

ANATOMY

The PCL sits behind the ACL in the center of the knee, forming the back half of the "X" the two ligaments create together. It works with the surrounding capsule and posterolateral structures to control backward translation of the tibia.

SYMPTOMS

- Deep knee pain, often worse with kneeling or descending stairs
- Mild-to-moderate swelling, sometimes less dramatic than an ACL tear
- A sense of instability, particularly on uneven ground
- Stiffness and difficulty with full range of motion

DIAGNOSIS

Exam includes the posterior drawer test and evaluation for associated ligament injury. MRI confirms the tear, grades its severity, and identifies any combined injury to the posterolateral corner or other ligaments, which changes treatment significantly.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Many isolated, low-grade PCL tears heal well with bracing and targeted physical therapy. Higher-grade tears, combined ligament injuries, or persistent instability are treated with PCL reconstruction using a tendon graft to restore stability.

RECOVERY TIMELINE

- Weeks 0–6: bracing, protected weight-bearing, swelling control

- Months 2–4: progressive strengthening and motion
- Months 4–9: sport-specific training as stability allows
- Return-to-sport clearance is individualized and often later than ACL recovery

FAQS

Q Do all PCL tears need surgery?

No. Many isolated PCL injuries respond well to bracing and physical therapy without surgery.

Q Is PCL recovery different from ACL recovery?

Yes. PCL reconstruction generally requires more protected weight-bearing early on and a more gradual rehab progression.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/pcl-tear.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.