Playing sports related to better outcomes after repeat ACL surgery

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Video Abstract

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Abstract

Undergoing a second operation to reconstruct a torn anterior cruciate ligament , or A-C-L, is difficult for anyone. But it could be particularly hard for those who don't play sports after surgery. A new study shows that among patients undergoing a repeat ACL reconstruction, those who play one or more sports following their procedure report reduced knee symptoms, better knee function, and higher activity level than those who play no sports. These findings could help clinicians and patients build better pathways to recovery from ACL injury. Using a questionnaire, researchers followed up with more than 900 patients 2 years after revision ACL reconstruction. Slightly more than half of the patients were male, and patients' average age was 26. In addition to questions regarding knee injury history and knee-specific outcomes, patients were asked whether they had participated in sports since undergoing surgery; and if so, which one—or ones. The team then analyzed their responses, searching for any pattern between reported outcomes regarding knee symptoms, knee function, and activity level and engagement in sports. They found that, overall, patients with no sports participation were up to nearly 4 times more likely to report significantly worse outcomes than patients participating in one sport. And up to nearly 6 times more likely to report significantly worse outcomes than those participating in multiple sports. These results suggest that continued physical activity after revision ACL reconstruction is associated with a significant increase in function and quality of life and decreased [pain and stiffness at 2 years post-surgery. One important limitation of the study is that it doesn't address the frequency or intensity of sports play after surgery. Patients were asked to simply indicate the sports they've played since their operation. That correlation could be addressed in future studies—as could the fate of patients who were actively engaged in sports before revision surgery but then stopped after. The current findings are still quite meaningful. Understanding that playing one or multiple sports after revision ACL reconstruction could be good for recovery could help clinicians and patients develop healthier habits following ACL injury.