

Posterior Cruciate Ligament (PCL) Tears

What is the PCL?

The PCL is one of four major stabilising ligaments of the knee. It functions to prevent backwards movement of the shin bone (tibia) in relation to the thigh bone (femur) whilst also providing rotational stability and preventing hyperextension.

How do you damage your PCL?

The PCL is injured less frequently than the other knee ligaments. The severity of the injury can differ drastically from a slight strain (grade 1) to a complete rupture where the stability of the knee is compromised (grade 3)

The PCL is commonly injured in a traumatic event resulting in a direct blow to the front of the knee forcing the tibia backwards in relation to the femur, or from a twisting or hyperextension injury.

Signs and symptoms

- Audible snap or popping sensation
- Pain and swelling almost immediately post injury
- Poorly localised pain that can be felt at the back of the knee
- Feeling of instability like the knee will 'give way'

Diagnosing a PCL injury

A thorough objective examination by a skilled physiotherapist can be sufficient to diagnose a PCL tear.

Further investigation such as x-ray or MRI scans will often be ordered to confirm the diagnosis and determine the extent of the damage.

Management of PCL injury

PCL tears are often treated with conservative management; however success can largely depend on patient compliance and any associated injuries in the knee. In the initial phase following injury the **R.I.C.E.R** method should be followed. The use of crutches or a protective brace may be advised.

(R:REST, I:ICE, C:COMPRESSION, E:ELEVATION, R:REFERRAL)

As soon as tolerated patients will begin a rehabilitation program to restore full range of movement, minimise swelling and begin an appropriate strengthening program focussed largely on regaining quadriceps control, along with strengthening other key muscle groups.

Surgical intervention may be warranted for patients who have injuries to other structures, or who have not responded to conservative management.

Physiotherapy is a vital tool in managing PCL injuries and ensuring the best possible outcome. Most patients with a minor to moderate PCL injury will return to activity between 6-10 weeks.

If you would like any further information, or would like to make an appointment with one of our physiotherapists, please contact us on **(02) 9328 3822**

