

Affinity Map

PROGRESS TO DATE

<p>12 weeks since ACLR</p> <p>2 weeks fully locked out brace with crutches, then maybe 3 weeks was slight knee flexion, and 4 weeks was knee flexion in brace w/ one crutch.</p>	<p>1 year since ACLR</p> <p>About to go back to RTS tests but not sure if 100% mentally ready yet.</p>	<p>2 year since ACLR</p> <p>Took a couple of months after being cleared for full activity to feel psychologically comfortable playing sports again. Now at ~95%.</p>
<p>11 months since ACLR</p> <p>Light activity; can run for short amount of time but still feeling unsteady. Still feel stiff and sore.</p>	<p>1.5 years since ACLR</p> <p>Back to all athletic activities but performs less intensely—can cut, juggle but there is a lack of explosiveness, speed, and slight pain when running + limp.</p>	<p>8 months since ACLR</p> <p>Missing muscle on right quad but improvement in leg endurance.</p>
<p><1 year since ACLR</p> <p>Can run up and down stairs. 6 mile hikes uphill & can run 3-4 times per week; manageable pain in knee.</p>	<p>10 months since ACLR</p> <p>Struggled to start jogging/running at 3 months; at 6 months still running with a slight limp; still feel unsteadiness with single leg hops and pivoting movements.</p>	<p>7 months since ACLR</p> <p>Missing muscle on right quad but improvement in leg endurance.</p>

POST-INJURY STRESS

<p>Financial stress; hours lost at work.</p>	<p>High stress and boredom; tough feeling a lack of independence.</p>
<p>Academic/work stress; keep up with school during recovery even harder</p>	

Wished they had had someone to talk to who genuinely understood during the early stages—had support but never felt like anyone actually 'got it'

PHYSICAL THERAPY EXPERIENCE

<p>Felt restricted money-wise; every PT visit costs \$80+ & unexpected spendings; had to buy crutches, compression/ice machine was 300\$ and TENS machine to have a proper recovery</p>	<p>Insurance-limited number of therapy appointments was restricting</p>	<p>Hard to prioritize PT over daily responsibilities because life goes on.</p> <p>Academic/work stress; keep up with school during recovery even harder</p>
<p>Felt a lot of indifference from surgeon; PT was better but still not much sympathy</p>	<p>"I've heard of great athletes who made amazing comebacks, so it seems it's possible, but they also tend to have advantages, trainers, daily regimens, unlimited therapy, etc."</p>	<p>Personal connection with physical therapist helped during tough times; act as someone to talk to.</p>
<p>Moved at own pace with physio but felt unconfident in progress when not guided</p>	<p>Found it hard to stay consistent and motivated to show up to physio; tried to do on own account but only made them feel more lost</p>	<p>Physio therapist provided re-assurance me that it would be okay and answered all questions</p>

POST-SURGERY ISOLATION

<p>Depressed, anxious, and several mental breakdowns.</p> <p>Struggled a lot at first: in denial and stubborn about recovery</p>	<p>Huge life disruption: Difficulty to do easy day to day routine took a toll on mental health; took time off work and couldn't hang out with friends—extremely isolating.</p>	<p>Post surgery depression was really hard.</p> <p>"I think it is something that is often overlooked in ACL rehab."</p>	<p>Mainly played sports in free time = social aspect and self-identity as an athlete was affected.</p> <p>Going from active to couching in an instant was depressing.</p>
<p>Felt mentally isolated from close friends and family who cared but kept on with their lives.</p>	<p>"My friends, who don't really understand what's going on, literally told me that I was isolating myself—but the issue is that I couldn't bring myself to get out of this hole."</p>	<p>Mental health decreases as mobility increases:</p> <p>still restricted in activities, especially not being able to join friends doing activities more so and feeling less inspired.</p>	<p>Felt alone and isolated for most of recovery—especially because during covid</p>

FEAR OF RE-INJURY

<p>Every jump (tore acl by landing wrong) the thought of fear crosses mind. There is an entire field of research focused on the fear of movement following ACL injury.</p>	<p>Currently struggling immensely with paranoia and doubt.</p>	<p>Struggled a lot with the idea of ever playing soccer again because terrified of having to go through this all over again.</p>
<p>About 3 months out and still struggling to get a grip on the anxiety about re-tearing graft or injure contralateral knee</p>	<p>Psychologically & physically has never been the same after ACL tear. Can even be hard to watch football.</p>	<p>Still not 100% and thinks of it constantly—a weird (not pain really) but hyper-consciousness of knee during any activity.</p>
<p>About 3 months out and still struggling to get a grip on the anxiety about re-tearing graft or injure contralateral knee</p>		

UNCERTAINTY

<p>Ups & downs: Days where positive and think things are getting better quickly and now it feels like you don't know when it will end.</p>	<p>Post surgery depression was really hard.</p> <p>"I think it is something that is often overlooked in ACL rehab."</p>
<p>Don't know why it hurts or if something has gone wrong. Think things are getting better quickly and now it feels like you don't know when it will end.</p>	<p>Mental health decreases as mobility increases:</p> <p>still restricted in activities, especially not being able to join friends doing activities more so and feeling less inspired.</p>
<p>Felt mentally isolated from close friends and family who cared but kept on with their lives.</p>	<p>"My friends, who don't really understand what's going on, literally told me that I was isolating myself—but the issue is that I couldn't bring myself to get out of this hole."</p>

Affinity Map (cont'd.)

OVERALL COMMENTS

Felt "agonizingly slow" in the first couple of months, but it got better and easier every day.

Significant impact on dream of being a lifelong athlete; back to playing pick up soccer so there is athletic potential

"It is implicit but I think I could have dealt with the process a little differently if I had prepared mentally for the recovery."

"probably the hardest pill I've had to swallow was realizing my knee would never be the same."

Teaches patience and discipline; tough journey but learn how to face adversity and stay resilient

Ask for help
When mental health is affected, ask for help from a therapist or reach out to someone from ACL community; helps to talk.

Choose a good PT (and surgeon if possible). Preferably one who has worked for a sports team. **Ask about surgery**, what graft they use, and what their protocol is after surgery.

Research!
Read articles about ACL grafts and the advantages and disadvantages of each type.; major surgery with major implications.

Find other interests & adapt
Pick up new hobbies, meditation, books – enjoy the "rest" as much as you can.

FEELINGS ABOUT RETURNING TO SPORT

Significant impact on dream of being a lifelong athlete; back to playing pick up soccer so there is athletic potential

Academic/work stress; keep up with school during recovery even harder

Hard to find outlets to express frustrations

ADVICE TO FUTURE ACL PATIENTS

Push yourself and don't stop doing your pt exercises and know that in a few more weeks you will progress on to different movements or exercises.

Constant reality-checks: "Nobody is truly gonna know how much this sucks but you, it's not that nobody cares but they aren't in our shoes."

Make a plan of action (with PT if possible)
Try to set goals so you can stay on track and know what you're working towards. It's very easy to lose motivation.

Really understand that it's not just physical injury; know that loss of receptors, AMI, and psychological fear are common reasons for decreased performance in year 1.

COPING MECHANISMS / MOTIVATION MANAGEMENT TIPS

Spent months watching motivational videos, **seeing how different people responded to ACL surgery**

Inquired a lot of what **other people's experience** were like; negative because it prompted a toxic comparison at times but it was nice to know they weren't alone and others experienced this as well.

Tried seeking out more people to see how this may be affecting them, so I am trying to start a peer support group for those who are dealing with an ACL injury now.

"Given the negativity bias that most humans have, I doubt I'd be able to reliably remember my progress if I hadn't written it down."

Recounted progress in Journal and acknowledged little milestones (no pain meds, no limp when walk, going out, etc); **helped to keep mood from sinking too low.**

Focused on art and painting (**secondary hobbies** to physical activities)

Read books and meditated to **develop spirituality** – helpful with managing post-op sleeplessness, constipation, and pain

Journaling was key to making sure mental health stayed in tact; allowed to see that the progress was real, tangible, and specific.

Key insights:

- **Fear of reinjury**= most prominent emotion during transition from rehab to RTS
- **Uncertainty** experienced most in early stages of recovery
- Learning about others' experiences and feeling heard from others who understand is important
- **Plateaus!!** Important to address

Questions/ Research Needed / Gaps

- What is the basis of fear of reinjury?
- How do you approach it if everyone has different recovery experiences?
- **Contributors to psychological readiness:**
 - Motivation
 - Confidence



Natalia Leon
Soccer Player

"My life revolved around soccer. The thought of not being able to play it was gut wrenching. My mental health had been in a slow decline"

Age: 24 years old

Job: Marketing

Hobbies: Soccer, Running

Progress: 12 months

Bio



Natalia is a 24-year-old marketing professional and fitness enthusiast who loves running, cycling, and playing soccer. Recently, she tore her ACL during a spring league soccer game.

She is currently recovering from surgery and is now 3 months in which has left her feeling frustrated and sidelined from her favourite activities. She wants to back to her active lifestyle as soon as possible but is struggling with facing the long road ahead.

Frustrations



- Feeling overwhelmed, lost, uncertain
- Inability to engage in high-energy activities to let out frustration
- New pressure to balance work and rehabilitation has led to stress
- Difficulty w/ discipline and motivation

Goals



- Return to active lifestyle; soccer 3x a week and running
- Regain confidence in her body and abilities, both on and off the field.
- Combat feeling of isolation; find ways to connect with others
- Learn to accept and adjust to her new reality
- Use her experience as a platform for inspiring and supporting other athletes facing similar challenges.

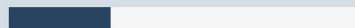
Recovery: 12 months



Range of Motion (bending)



Mental Health



Mobility (walking)



Pain Point
Uncertainty

Personalized recommendations based on user's current mental state, goals, and progress

Have the right information at the right time; educational hub help feel more informed and in control

Active and intentional efforts to manage feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about recovery

Receive constant reassurance to minimize paranoia and doubt

User Need
Confidence

Pain Point
Low Motivation

Progress trackers and reminders to celebrate milestones, and be able to share achievements

Accountability partner to increase discipline and evoke feeling of responsibility for a successful recovery

Learn the importance and purpose behind each exercise so it doesn't feel meaningless

Focus on connection between efforts and the desired outcomes, along w/ positive reinforcement

User Need
Accountability

Pain Point
Isolation

Feel heard and valued by professionals and/or close friends and family

Connect with individuals who have undergone similar rehab experiences

Transparency about mental difficulties with recovery; access to mental health professionals

Access to virtual events, webinars, and workshops focused on mental health and resilience about ACL recovery

User Need
Community