

The human body is a magnificent mass of muscle and bone. Within the muscles and bones there are ligaments and tendons. The knees are mobile joints that allow you to walk, climb, sit and kneel. I tore a major ligament in my knee called the Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). This ligament (ACL) is a band of tough tissue that joins the upper and lower leg bones. The ACL also supports the knee joint. It helps with lateral movement. Unfortunately, the ACL cannot repair itself without help. You need surgery to fix it and time for rehabilitation. The tearing of an ACL can occur while twisting the knee too far or when changing direction quickly. These injuries occur more frequently with those that participate in skiing, basketball, soccer, lacrosse and football. The ACL can even be torn if you fall. When falling you hear a “pop” or “snap” as the ligament tears. After the injury occurs your knee will feel wobbly while walking because the knee joint has no support.

If you have a torn ACL you may need a procedure called ACL reconstruction. During the surgery, healthy tissue is put where the ACL used to be. The tissue is called a graft. Tiny screws, staples or stitches hold the graft in. There are three kinds of grafts, a piece of the patella tendon, which is in front of the kneecap, a cadaver tendon or a hamstring graft. I have a hamstring graft in place of my ACL. After surgery the leg is kept in a brace and will have ice kept on it at most times to reduce the swelling of the knee. A continuous passive motion (CPM) machine is supplied to you by the insurance company to prevent stiffness or adhesions in the knee.

I also partially tore my meniscus, which is a pad of cartilage that absorbs shock in the knee joint. To repair the torn cartilage the doctor used stitches to mend the meniscus. Because surgery is so invasive diagnostic tests may help determine if surgery is needed. Some tools the doctor might use are X-rays or MRI's. X-rays are pictures of bones that make it possible to see problems, fracture. MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) gives an inside view of the knee's soft tissues.

On the day of surgery, you may not eat or drink anything for eight to ten hours before the time of surgery. In addition, you want your injured leg to be as straight as the uninjured leg because the less swelling the better. You also want the quadriceps muscles in your injured leg as strong as they can be so they can support the knee after the surgery. Some doctors may recommend physical therapy prior to surgery to strengthen the quad muscles. I was lucky to be able to train at Vertex. The trainers were very knowledgeable and knew just what I needed to strengthen. They also showed me important exercises to do on my own. In surgery an arthroscope is used, which is a tiny camera that lets doctors see inside the joint. Tools are inserted through small incisions to repair the joint. For my surgery I had three incisions, but only one will be visible once it heals.

In conclusion while I have been sitting on the sidelines watching my teammates play my favorite sport, soccer I think about how awful it is to be injured. I continue to work hard in my rehab with assistance from the trainers at Vertex. My Vertex trainers not only help strengthen my muscles, they also give

me the encouragement and motivation to push myself to my full potential. I dream about getting back on the field to play as if it is the last game I will ever play. I have been helping my teammates by motivating them through cheers. You do not realize what you have until you do not have it any longer.