

KNEE

PCL Tear

The posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) is another strong ligament in the knee. It prevents the shin bone from moving backwards and helps with overall knee stability. A PCL tear happens when this ligament is damaged, usually from a direct force to the knee.

Common causes

- Motor vehicle accidents, where the knee strikes the dashboard
- Falling onto a bent knee
- Sports injuries involving a direct blow to the knee

Symptoms

- Pain at the back of the knee
- Mild to moderate swelling
- Stiffness
- A feeling of weakness or instability, often less dramatic than with an ACL tear
- Difficulty going downhill or downstairs

How it's diagnosed

A physical examination along with an MRI scan.

Treatment

Most PCL tears are treated non-surgically, with rest and bracing, physical therapy, and strengthening of the thigh muscles — many PCL tears heal well without surgery.

Surgery is less common, but may be considered for severe tears, combined ligament injuries, or ongoing instability despite rehabilitation.

Recovery

- Daily activities: 4–6 weeks
- Sports: 3–6 months, depending on severity

Recovery is often faster than for ACL tears, and many people return to normal activities with rehabilitation alone. Good long-term outcomes are typical for most patients.

Key takeaway

PCL tears often heal without surgery. Early diagnosis and proper rehabilitation are important for the best outcome.