

Exercises To Help Prevent ACL Injuries

A Physical Therapist's Perspective

Physical therapists recommend that female athletes perform a series of exercises to improve strength, flexibility, and coordination, as well as to counteract incorrect existing patterns of movement that may be damaging to their joints. These movement patterns may put them at greater risk for injuring their Anterior Cruciate Ligaments (ACL).

These exercises demonstrate a sample of an injury prevention program and are not intended as a substitute for a treatment program designed by a physical therapist or other health care professional.

To find a physical therapist in your area, visit www.findapt.us

- 1 Single Leg Balance:** Stand on one leg with your knee slightly bent and attempt to maintain your balance for 15 to 30 seconds. Keep your hip, knee, and foot aligned with hip over knee over foot. Do 1-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions on each foot. *As this task becomes easy, make it more challenging by increasing the time you stand on your foot and by standing on a soft surface, such as a pillow or foam pad.*



- 2 Heel Touches:** Stand on one foot on a solid and sturdy box or a step with the other foot off the edge. With your hands on your hips, bend your stance leg and lower your body down until your opposite heel, on the hanging leg, touches the ground and then push back up. Keep your hips level and your hip, knee and foot aligned while you execute this exercise. Do 2-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions on each foot. *If you feel pain in the front of your knee, select a lower step height or discontinue this exercise.*



- 3 Wall Squats:** Lean up against a wall with your back against it and your feet 12-24 inches away from the wall. Bend your knees and slide down the wall until your knees are directly over your ankles. If your knees are positioned over your toes, you have squatted too far. Hold this position for 10 to 30 seconds and push back up to standing. Do 1 set of 5-10 repetitions. *To increase the challenge of this exercise, increase the time you hold the squat position and/or add a resistance band around the top of your knees. If you experience pain in the front of your knee, try decreasing the depth of your squat or discontinue this exercise.*



4 Single Leg Bridge: Lay on your back with one knee bent slightly and one leg straight. Using the bent leg as your support leg, elevate your trunk and hips, bringing your shoulders, hips and leg in a straight line. Hold this position for 10-30 seconds. Do 1-3 sets of 10-12 repetitions.



5 Lunge Step: Stand with your feet together and step forward with one leg, bending your knee to 90 degrees after your foot hits the ground. *Make sure the front knee remains over the ankle and does not go past step foot.* Continue moving your body forward by bringing your back (stationary) leg forward, then together with your step leg. Alternate legs with each step. Do 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions.



6 Broad Jump: Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and jump forward, landing on both feet. Focus on taking small, controlled jumps and landing with equal weight distribution on each leg. Concentrate on soft, quiet landings and maintaining your lower extremities in good alignment, with your hips over your knees, and knees over your feet. Make sure your knees do not come together when you land from this jump. Over time, this exercise can be progressed by increasing the length of the jump. This exercise should be monitored either by a partner or with a mirror.



Physical therapists are health care professionals who diagnose and manage individuals of all ages who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. Physical therapists examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Physical therapists also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility by developing fitness-and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.

The American Physical Therapy Association is a national organization representing physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students nationwide. Its goal is to foster advancements in physical therapist education, practice, and research. Consumers can access physical therapy news and information at www.apta.org/consumer.