

ACL Tear Recovery: At-Home Exercise Program

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Overview

This progressive, 3-phase exercise program is designed for individuals recovering from an ACL tear who are either avoiding surgery or preparing for it. It focuses on reducing pain and swelling, restoring range of motion, building quad strength, and improving balance and functional control—all from the comfort of home.

Phase 1: Early Recovery (0–2 Weeks Post-Injury)

Goals: Reduce swelling, restore motion, activate quadriceps

Frequency: 1–2x per day, as tolerated

1. Calf Stretch with Strap

- Sit with your leg extended, loop a strap around your foot.
- Pull the strap gently toward you to stretch the calf.
- Hold 20 seconds, repeat 5 times.

2. Hamstring Stretch with Strap

- Lie on your back, loop a strap around your foot.
- Raise your leg until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings.
- Hold 20 seconds, repeat 5 times.

3. Heel Prop

- Rest heel on a rolled towel or foam roller.
- Let the knee relax into extension.
- Hold 3–5 minutes, repeat 2–3 times.

4. Heel Slides

- Lie on your back with both legs straight.
- Slide your heel toward your buttocks slowly.
- Perform 10–15 reps, repeat 2–3 times per day.

5. Quad Set

- Place a rolled towel under your knee.
- Press the knee down by tightening the thigh.

- Hold 5 seconds, perform 15 reps.

6. Straight Leg Raise

- Tighten your quad, lift the straight leg 12–18 inches.
- Pause at the top, then lower with control.
- Perform 10–15 reps, 2–3 sets per day.

7. Short Arc Quad

- Lie down with a towel roll under your knee.
- Straighten the knee to lift your heel.
- Hold 3 seconds, perform 10–15 reps.

8. Long Arc Quad

- Sit in a chair with feet flat.
- Extend your knee fully, then return slowly.
- Perform 10–15 reps, 2–3 sets.

9. Ice & TENS (if available)

- Ice for 15–20 minutes, 2–3 times daily.
 - Use TENS as directed to reduce pain and aid quad activation.
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Phase 2: Recovery & Functional Movement (2–4 Weeks)

Goals: Improve functional strength, mobility, and balance

Frequency: 1–2x per day

1. Calf Stretch on Slant Board

- Stand with toes elevated on slant board.
- Lean forward into a deep calf stretch.
- Hold 20 seconds, repeat 5 times.

2. Prone Quad Stretch with Strap

- Lie on your stomach, loop a strap around your ankle.
- Gently pull foot toward glutes until stretch is felt.
- Hold 20 seconds, repeat 5 times.

3. Heel Raises & Toe Raises

- Stand tall, rise onto toes, then back onto heels.
- Move slowly, maintain balance.
- Perform 10–15 reps, repeat 2–3 times.

4. Cone Step-Overs

- Line up cones and step over them slowly.
- Alternate lead leg, stay balanced.
- Perform 2–3 rounds.

5. Step-Ups (Forward)

- Stand in front of a step with counter nearby.
- Step up with injured leg, then lower with control.
- Perform 10–15 reps, repeat 2–3 sets.

6. Lateral Step-Overs

- Stand to the side of the step.
- Step up laterally, then down with control.
- Perform 8–10 reps per side.

7. Single Leg Balance

- Stand on your injured leg in front of a counter.
- Hold 20–30 seconds, repeat 2–3 times.
- Progress by using foam or closing eyes.

Phase 3: Strength & Return to Function (4–8 Weeks)

Goals: Strengthen quads and hips, improve control and dynamic balance

Frequency: 1–2x per day

1. Goblet Squats

- Hold dumbbell at chest, feet shoulder-width.
- Squat down with control, keeping chest tall.
- Perform 10–15 reps, repeat 2–3 sets.

2. Single Leg RDL (Romanian Deadlift)

- Stand on injured leg, hold weight in opposite hand.
- Hinge at hips while extending free leg back.
- Perform 10 reps per leg, repeat 2–3 sets.

3. Step Downs

- Stand on step, slowly lower opposite heel toward floor.
- Keep knee in line with toes.
- Perform 10–12 reps per side.

4. Sidesteps with Band

- Place band above knees, lower into slight squat.
- Step sideways with control, maintain band tension.
- Take 8–10 steps each way, repeat 2–3 rounds.

Disclaimer: Always consult your physical therapist or healthcare provider before starting any new rehab program. Stop any movement that causes increased pain or swelling.

ACL Tear Recovery Exercise Tracker

You can use this tracker to log your exercises, track consistency, and monitor your progress over time. Just check off each exercise as you complete it each day.

Instructions: Place a ✓ or X under each day you complete the exercise. Use the “Notes” column to record pain, difficulty, or improvements.

Exercise	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Notes
Calf Stretch (Strap/Board)								
Hamstring Stretch								
Heel Prop								
Heel Slides								
Quad Set								
Straight Leg Raise								
Short Arc Quad								
Long Arc Quad								
Prone Quad Stretch								
Heel/Toe Raises								
Step-Ups								
Step Downs								
Cone Step-Overs								
Lateral Step-Overs								
Goblet Squats								
Single Leg RDL								
Sidesteps with Band								
Single Leg Balance								

How to Use:

- **Print** this tracker weekly or copy/paste a new table for each new week.
- You can also replace the days with **Week 1**, **Week 2**, etc., if that’s more helpful.
- Feel free to **highlight specific exercises** for each phase as you progress.