

Week 1 ACL Surgery Exercise Program

Physical Therapy Simplified | ACL Recovery Series



Goals This Week:

- Reduce swelling and inflammation
- Restore full knee extension
- Begin gentle quad activation
- Protect the surgical graft
- Minimize stiffness and scar tissue formation

Note: Always follow your surgeon's post-op protocol. These are general PT guidelines used in early ACL recovery.



Week 1 ACL Rehab Exercises

1. Calf Stretch with Strap

Purpose: Improve calf flexibility and promote early knee extension

How to Do It:

- Sit with leg extended, loop a strap around the ball of your foot
- Pull gently until you feel a stretch in your calf
- Hold for 20 seconds, repeat 5x

Pro Tip: A strap with loops offers better control

2. Hamstring Stretch

Purpose: Reduce tightness behind the knee and improve mobility

How to Do It:

- Lie on your back, loop a strap around your foot
- Slowly lift your leg until you feel a stretch in the back of the thigh
- Hold for 20 seconds, repeat 5x

Pro Tip: Keep the opposite leg bent to support your lower back

3. Heel Prop

Purpose: Restore full passive knee extension

How to Do It:

- Lie with your heel resting on a rolled towel
 - Let your knee fully straighten and relax
 - Hold for 5–10 minutes
- Pro Tip:** Add ice and elevate for swelling control

4. Quad Set (Towel Under Knee)

Purpose: Activate the quad muscle without knee movement

How to Do It:

- Place a towel under the knee
 - Tighten your thigh to press the knee into the towel
 - Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 10–15x
- Pro Tip:** Watch your kneecap lift—this means the quad is firing

5. Quad Set (Towel Under Ankle)

Purpose: Promote quad contraction and full knee extension

How to Do It:

- Lie with a towel under your ankle
 - Contract your quad to press the knee downward
 - Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 10–15x
- Pro Tip:** A slight stretch behind the knee is a good sign

6. Straight Leg Raise (*only if quad is active*)

Purpose: Strengthen the quad without bending the knee

How to Do It:

- Brace your leg straight and tighten your thigh
- Lift the leg 12 inches off the floor

- Lower slowly and repeat 10x
Pro Tip: Use your other leg or a helper if needed early on
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7. Short Arc Quad

Purpose: Target the quad through a small, safe range

How to Do It:

- Place a foam roller or towel under your knee
 - Straighten your lower leg, then return to start
 - Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 10–15x
Pro Tip: Don't let the thigh lift off the roll
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8. Heel Slides

Purpose: Gently restore knee bending (flexion)

How to Do It:

- Lie on your back with legs extended
 - Slowly slide your heel toward your buttocks
 - Pause, then slide back to the start. Repeat 10–15x
Pro Tip: Use a towel or strap for assistance if needed
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9. Ice & TENS for Pain, Swelling, and Quad Activation

Purpose: Manage swelling, improve comfort, and activate the quad

How to Do It:

- **Ice:** 15–20 minutes, 3–5x/day with elevation
- **TENS:** Use with quad sets to stimulate contraction
- **Combo:** Apply both for improved pain and muscle response
Pro Tip: Don't place ice directly on the skin; always follow TENS device instructions



Week 1 ACL Surgery Exercise Tracker

Exercise	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Calf Stretch with Strap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hamstring Stretch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heel Prop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quad Set (Towel Under Knee)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quad Set (Towel Under Ankle)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Straight Leg Raise (if able)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short Arc Quad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heel Slides	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ice (3–5x/day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TENS (if prescribed)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Instructions:

- Check each box after completing that day's routine.
- Most exercises should be done **2–3x per day**, so feel free to print multiple sheets or write in rep counts if you prefer.
- Consistency matters more than intensity—early progress is all about **routine and quad reactivation**.