



WHAT'S THAT 'POP' IN MY

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When Jason Sehorn, defensive back for the New York Giants, felt a “pop” in his knee it did not take him long to realize his season was over.

Other high-profile athletes such as Terrell Davis, running back for the Denver Broncos and Jamal Anderson of the Atlanta Falcons had similar experiences.

ACL knee injuries have become quite common among the NFL elite. Despite superb physical conditioning and protective equipment, knee injuries continue to be a major concern for athletes.

You do not have to be a high level athlete to sustain an ACL injury. Recreational athletes sustain this knee injury routinely. Although the term “ACL tear” is used commonly in the media and is a hot topic of conversation at cocktail parties, many individuals do not understand what an ACL is or how to tell if they have sustained an injury.

ACL stands for the anterior cruciate ligament. This ligament connects the thigh bone (femur) to the leg bone (tibia) and keeps the knee joint from slipping out of place. When this ligament is injured, the knee becomes unstable.

Sports requiring cutting and twisting maneuvers will cause the knee joint to give-out. When this occurs, repeatedly irreversible cartilage damage leading to arthritis is likely to occur.

A typical ACL injury occurs in an athlete who is running and trying to change directions quickly. The leg is held firmly planted to the ground as the body continues to move, resulting in a twisting force to the knee. The sensation of a “pop” which frequently accompanies the injury is the sound the ACL makes when it ruptures. Immediate swelling of the knee and significant pain usually follows.

Initial first aid for this injury is to splint and ice the knee. Seek medical attention as soon as possible. An MRI can confirm the diagnosis and assess if any associated cartilage damage has taken place.

Although ACL tears have become all too common, there is some good news. Surgical reconstruction of a torn ACL has come a long way in recent years.



Current arthroscopic surgical techniques are highly successful. The surgery is performed as an out-patient. Physical therapy is started immediately after surgery. Most athletes are able to return to sports within four to six months.

In summary, an athlete who sustains a twisting injury to the knee, accompanied by a “pop” and followed by swelling, probably has sustained an ACL tear.

The knee should be immobilized and iced immediately. ACL surgery is highly successful at stabilizing the knee, reducing the chances of developing arthritis and returning the athlete to competition in a timely manner.