

ACL reconstruction doesn't harm NFL career length, study suggests

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Knee injuries are a common problem in collegiate and professional football, often hindering an individual's career length and future. A study presented at the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine's Annual Meeting in Keystone, Colorado suggests that anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction versus a simple meniscus repair may predict a longer professional career in those that have suffered knee injuries.

"ACL reconstruction is a reliable surgical technique that enables professional football players to have similar length careers as their counterparts without ACL injuries. Although meniscectomy has a shorter recovery time than ACL reconstruction, these surgeries appear to lead to a significantly shorter career with fewer games played in the long term," said lead author Robert H. Brophy, MD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Orthopaedic [Surgery](#) at the Washington University School of Medicine and Assistant Team Physician for the St. Louis Rams.

The study utilized a database containing the injury history and career NFL statistics of athletes from 1987-2000. Athletes who had a history of meniscectomy and/or ACL surgery and no other surgery or major injury were matched to a control group of athletes without previous surgeries. Athletes were also matched by position, year drafted, round drafted and additional history. Fifty-four athletes with a history of meniscectomies, 29 with a history of ACL reconstruction and 11 with a history of both were identified and matched to controls.

The results illustrated that those individuals with meniscectomy on average reduced the length of their careers by approximately 1.5 years and their games played by 23. Isolated ACL surgery did not significantly reduce the length of years or games played. In those [athletes](#) with both surgeries, careers were shortened on average by nearly two years and 32 games.

"A combination of ACL reconstruction and meniscectomy may be more detrimental to an athlete's durability than either surgery alone. With further research, we will be able to better understand how these injuries and surgeries impact an athlete's career and what can be done to improve long-term outcomes," said Brophy.

Source: American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

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