

The Santa Monica ACL Injury Prevention Project (PEP)

Part 1: What it is and why it was developed

The Santa Monica ACL Prevention Project has developed the PEP Program in order to implement a strategic training program to decrease the number of ACL injuries incurred by female soccer players. Since the implementation of Title IX legislation in 1972 allowing equal opportunity for girls and women to participate in sports, there has been a significant increase in the number of females participating in competitive sports.

However, the total number of injuries has also increased. Studies have shown that a female soccer player's risk of sustaining an ACL injury is two to eight times greater than her male counterpart. Subsequent studies have shown that adding neuromuscular and proprioceptive exercises to the training regimen can reduce the number of ACL injuries by two to four fold.

What is the PEP Program?

The PEP (Prevent injury, Enhance Performance) Program is a highly specific 15-minute training session that replaces the traditional warm-up. It was developed by a team of physicians, physical therapists, athletic trainers and coaches, and has funding support from the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAF). The program's main focus is educating players on strategies to avoid injury and includes specific exercises targeting problems as identified in previous research studies.

1. Avoid vulnerable positions
2. Increase flexibility
3. Increase strength
4. Include plyometric exercises into the training program
5. Increase proprioception though agilities

Most program exercises and drills are already part of a team's standard training. However, it will require attention to detail on the part of players, coaches and trainers. Optimally the program should be performed at least 2-3 times per week during the season.

This prevention program consists of a warm-up, stretching, strengthening, plyometrics, and sport specific agilities to address potential deficits in the strength and coordination of the stabilizing muscles around the knee joint. It is important to use proper technique during all of the exercises. The coaches and trainers need to emphasize correct posture, straight up and down jumps without excessive side-to-side movement, and reinforce soft landings. This program should be completed 2 to 3 times a week at a minimum.

Next page > [See the PEP Program Exercises.](#)

Recent Update: The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, in conjunction with the Santa Monica Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Research Foundation, have created an [online video instruction series](#) illustrating the PEP program exercises.

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PEP Program Phase One: Warm-up

The field should be set up 10 minutes prior to the warm-up (Click [Here](#) to see field). This will allow for a smooth and quick transition between all of the activities.

This program should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Alongside each exercise you will notice a box with the approximate amount of time that should be spent on each activity. This will serve as a guideline to you in order to conduct your warm-up in a time-efficient manner.

Warm-up:

Warming up and cooling down are a crucial part of a training program. The purpose of the warm-up section is to allow the athlete to prepare for activity. By warming up your muscles first, you greatly reduce the risk of injury.

1. Jog line to line (cone to cone):

Elapsed Time: 0 - .5 minute

Purpose: Allows the athletes to slowly prepare themselves for the training session while minimizing the risk for injury. Educate athletes on good running technique; keep the hip/knee/ankle in straight alignment without the knee caving in or the feet whipping out to the side.

Instruction: Complete a slow jog from near to far sideline

2. Shuttle Run (side to side)

Elapsed Time: .5 to 1 minute

Purpose: engage hip muscles (inner and outer thigh). This exercise will promote increased speed. Discourage inward caving of the knee joint.

Instruction: Start in an athletic stance with a slight bend at the knee. Leading with the right foot, sidestep pushing off with the left foot (back leg). When you drive off with the back leg, be sure the hip/knee/ankle are in a straight line. Switch sides at half field.

3. Backward Running

Elapsed Time: 1-1.5 minutes

Purpose: continued warm-up; engage hip extensors/hamstrings. Make sure the athlete lands on her toes. Be sure to watch for locking of the knee joint. As the athlete brings her foot back, make sure she maintains a slight bend to the knee.

Instruction: Run backwards from sideline to sideline. Land on your toes without snapping the knee back. Stay on your toes and keep the knees slightly bent at all times.

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PEP Program Phase Two: Stretching

Stretching:

It is important to incorporate a short warm-up prior to stretching. Never stretch a "cold muscle". By doing the exercises outlined here, you can improve and maintain your range of motion, reduce stiffness in your joints, reduce post-exercise soreness, reduce the risk of injury and improve your overall mobility and performance.

- Do a large muscle warm-up such as brisk walking for five to 10 minutes before stretching.
- Don't bounce or jerk when you stretch. Gently stretch to a point of tension and hold.
- Hold the stretch for 30 seconds. Concentrate on lengthening the muscles when you're stretching.
- Breathe normally. Don't hold your breath.

1. Calf stretch (30 seconds x 2 reps)

Elapsed Time: 1.5 to 2.5 minutes

Purpose: Stretch the calf muscle of the lower leg.

Instruction: Stand leading with your right leg. Bend forward at the waist and place your hands on the ground (V formation). Keep your right knee slightly bent and your left leg straight. Make sure your left foot is flat on the ground. Do not bounce during the stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. Switch sides and repeat.

2. Quadricep stretch (30 seconds x 2 reps)

Elapsed Time: 2.5 to 3.5 minutes

Purpose: Stretch the quadricep muscle of the front of the thigh.

Instruction: Place your left hand on your partner's left shoulder. Reach back with your right hand and grab the front of your right ankle. Bring your heel to buttock. Make sure your knee is pointed down toward the ground. Keep your right leg close to your left. Do not allow knee to wing out to the side and do not bend at the waist. Hold for 30 seconds and switch sides.

3. Figure Four Hamstring stretch (30 sec x 2 reps)

Elapsed Time: 3.5 - 4.5 min

Purpose: To stretch the hamstring muscles of the back of the thigh.

Instruction: Sit on the ground with your right leg extended out in front of you. Bend your left knee and rest the bottom of your foot on your right inner thigh. With a straight back, try to bring your chest toward your knee. Do not round your back. If you can, reach down toward your toes and pull them up toward your head. Do not bounce. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

4. Inner Thigh Stretch (20 sec x 3 reps)

Elapsed Time: 4.5 - 5.5 min

Purpose: Elongate the muscles of the inner thigh (adductor group).

Instruction: Remain seated on the ground. Spread your legs evenly apart. Slowly lower yourself to the center with a straight back. You want to feel a stretch in the inner thigh. Now reach toward the right with the right arm. Bring your left arm overhead the stretch over to the right. Hold the stretch and repeat on the opposite side.

5. **Hip Flexor Stretch - (30 sec x 2 reps)**

Elapsed Time: 5.5 - 6.5 min

Purpose: Elongate the hip flexors of the front of the thigh.

Instruction: Lunge forward leading with your right leg. Drop your left knee down to the ground. Placing your hands on top of your right thigh, lean forward with your hips. The hips should be square with your shoulders. If possible, maintain your balance and lift back for the left ankle and pull your heel to your buttocks. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat on the other side.

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PEP Program Phase Phase 3: Strengthening

Strengthening:

This portion of the program focuses on increasing leg strength. This will lead to increased leg strength and a more stable knee joint. Technique is everything; close attention must be paid to the performance of these exercises in order to avoid injury.

1. Walking Lunges (3 sets x 10 reps)

Elapsed Time: 6.5 - 7.5 min

Purpose: Strengthen the thigh (quadriceps) muscle.

Instruction: Lunge forward leading with your right leg. Push off with your right leg and lunge forward with your left leg. Drop the back knee straight down. Make sure that you keep your front knee over your ankle. Control the motion and try to avoid your front knee from caving inward. If you cannot see your toes on your leading leg, you are doing the exercise incorrectly.

2. Russian Hamstring (3 sets x 10 reps)

Elapsed Time: 7.5 - 8.5 min

Purpose: Strengthen hamstrings muscles.

Instruction: Kneel on the ground with hands at your side. Have a partner hold firmly at your ankles. With a straight back, lean forward leading with your hips. Your knee, hip and shoulder should be in a straight line as you lean toward the ground. Do not bend at the waist. You should feel the hamstrings in the back of your thigh working. Repeat the exercise for 3 sets of 10, or a total of 30 reps.

3. Single Toe Raises (30 reps x 2 reps)

Elapsed Time: 8.5 - 9.5 min

Purpose: This exercise strengthens the calf muscle and increases balance.

Instruction: Stand up with your arms at your side. Bend the left knee up and maintain your balance. Slowly rise up on your right toes with good balance. You may hold your arms out ahead of you in order to help. Slowly repeat 30 times and switch to the other side. As you get stronger, you may need to add additional repetitions to this exercise to continue the strengthening effect of the exercise.

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PEP Program Phase Phase 4: Plyometrics

Plyometrics:

These exercises are explosive and help to build, power, strength and speed. The most important element when considering performance technique is the landing. It must be soft! When you land from a jump, you want to softly accept your weight on the balls of your feet slowly rolling back to the heel with a bent knee and a straight hip. These exercises are basic, however, it is critical to perform them correctly. Please take the time to ensure safe and correct completion of these exercises

1. Lateral Hops over Cone (20 reps)

Elapsed Time: 9.5 - 10 min

Purpose: Increase power/strength emphasizing neuromuscular control.

Instruction: Stand with a 6" cone to your left. Hop to the left over the cone softly landing on the balls of your feet land bending at the knee. Repeat this exercise hopping to the right.

2. Forward/Backward Hops over cone (20 reps)

Elapsed Time: 10 - 10.5 min

Purpose: Increase power/strength emphasizing neuromuscular control.

Instruction: Hop over the cone/ball softly landing on the balls of your feet and bending at the knee. Now, hop backwards over the ball using the same landing technique. Be careful not to snap your knee back to straighten it. You want to maintain a slight bend to the knee. Repeat for 20 reps.

3. Single Leg hops over cone (20 reps)

Elapsed Time: 10.5 - 11 min

Purpose: Increase power/strength emphasizing neuromuscular control.

Instruction: Hop over the cone/ball landing on the ball of your foot bending at the knee. Now, hop backwards over the ball using the same landing technique. Be careful not to snap your knee back to straighten it. You want to maintain a slight bend to the knee. Repeat for 20 reps. Now, stand on the left leg and repeat the exercise. Increase the number of repetitions as needed.

4. Vertical Jumps with headers (20 reps)

Elapsed Time: 11 - 11.5 min

Purpose: Increase height of vertical jump.

Instruction: Stand forward with hands at your side. Slightly bend the knees and push off jumping straight up. Remember the proper landing technique; accept the weight on the ball of your foot with a slight bend to the knee. Repeat 20 times and switch sides.

5. Scissors Jump (20 reps)

Elapsed Time: 11.5 - 12 min

Purpose: Increase power and strength of vertical jump.

Instruction: Lunge forward leading with your right leg. Keep your knee over your ankle. Now, push off with your right foot and propel your left leg forward into a lunge position. Be sure your knee does not cave in or out. It should be stable and directly over the ankle. Remember the proper landing technique; accept the weight on the ball of your foot with a slight bend to the knee. Repeat 20 times.

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PEP Program Phase 5: Agility

Agility Drills

Agility exercises are designed to improve the power and strength in the muscles.

1. **Shuttle run with forward/backward running**

Elapsed Time: 12 - 13 min

Purpose: Increase dynamic stability of the ankle/knee/hip complex.

Instruction: Starting at the first cone, sprint forward to the second cone, run backward to the third cone, sprint forward to the fourth cone (etc.).

2. **Diagonal runs (3 passes)**

Elapsed Time: 13 - 14 min

Purpose: To encourage proper technique/stabilization of the outside planted foot to deter the position from occurring.

Instruction: Face forward and run to the first cone on the left. Pivot off the left foot and run to the second cone. Now pivot off the right leg and continue onto the third cone. Make sure that the outside leg does not cave in. Keep a slight bend to the knee and make sure the knee stays over the ankle joint.

3. **Bounding run (44 yds)**

Elapsed Time: 14 - 15 min

Purpose: To increase hip flexion strength/increase power/speed.

Instruction: Starting on the near sideline, run to the far side with knees up toward chest. Bring your knees up high. Land on the ball of your foot with a slight bend at the knee and a straight hip. Increase the distance as this exercise gets easier.

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PEP Program: Cool Down

Cool Down

We all know how imperative a cool down is. Please do not skip it. It allows the muscles that have been working hard throughout the training session to elongate and deters the onset of muscle soreness.

Please emphasize the importance of adequate fluid intake (optimally water). Athletes should have a water bottle by their side during the cool down.

The cool down should take approximately 10 minutes. It should begin with a slow jog to allow the heart rate to come down before stretching. This should be followed by some light strength training exercises. We are recommending two strengthening exercises (see below). Finally, stretch the hamstrings, calves, inner thigh, quadriceps, and low back (all of these are explained in the protocol). In addition to those basic stretches, we are offering some additional stretches to target 3 muscle groups that are often forgotten.

1. Bridging with Alternating Hip Flexion (30 reps)

Purpose: Strengthen outer hip muscles (Hip abductors, flexors) and buttocks

Instruction: Lie on the ground with your knees bent with feet on the ground. Raise your buttocks up off the ground and squeeze. Now, lift your right foot off the ground and make sure that your right hip does not dip down. Lower your right foot and now lift your left foot making sure your left hip does not dip down. Repeat 30 times on each side. As you get stronger, you will place your feet on top of a ball and repeat the exercise.

2. Abdominal Crunches (30 reps x 2 reps)

Purpose: Strengthen the abdominals (rectus abdominus, obliques)

Instruction: Lie on the ground with your knees bent. Place your hands behind your head with your elbows out wide. Support your neck lightly with your fingers. Take a deep breath in and slowly contract your abdominal muscles as you exhale. Repeat 30 times. Drop your legs off to the right side. Slowly crunch up with your elbows out wide. You should feel your oblique muscles working on the side of your waist. Repeat 30 times and switch to the other side.

3. Single and Double Knee to Chest (supine) (30 sec x 2 reps)

Purpose: Elongate the low back muscles.

Instruction: Lie on your back. Bring your right knee toward your chest and hug firmly. Keep your left leg out straight in front of you. You should feel a stretch along your low back and into your buttocks. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and switch sides. Now bring both knees to chest. If you feel any pain in the low back, discontinue the stretch and inform your coach/trainer.

4. Figure Four Piriformis stretch- supine (30 sec x 2 reps)

Purpose: Elongate the rotators of the hip.

Instruction: Lie on your back and bend both of your knees. Fold your left ankle over your right knee. Place your hands behind your right thigh and pull your right knee to chest. You should feel a good stretch in the left gluteals region and the side of the thigh. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat on the other side. If you experience and low back pain with this stretch, slowly lower your legs down and let your coach/trainer know.

5. **Seated Butterfly stretch - seated (30 sec x 2 reps)**

Purpose: Elongate the inner thigh muscles (adductors).

Instruction: Sit up bringing your feet in so that the soles of your feet are touching. Gently place your elbows on your knees and slowly push down. You should feel a good stretch of the inner thigh. Hold this for 30 seconds and repeat 2 to 3 times.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this program, please contact Holly Silvers, MPT at (310) 315-0292 ext. 1283.