



Perceptions of ACL injury: fear factor or silver linings?

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A player's journey through ACL injury begins with the perceptions they have before it happens, the experience of the injury itself, and the ups and downs they go through during recovery.

For women and girl footballers, this journey is increasingly shaped by fear of the so-called "ACL epidemic".

Thankfully, simple strategies can be used to combat this and improve the outlook for players who are at risk of, or who have experienced, an ACL injury.



Overall injury rates in top-tier European women's football have remained consistent over the past two decades, but there is a perception that ACL injury rates are increasing to "epidemic" levels.



When ACL injuries happen, **NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES**

including depressive symptoms, anxiety, and low self-efficacy generally improve over time.



Although rare, some athletes experience **POSITIVE PERSONAL GROWTH** through injury.



Women and girls are between **23-32% LESS LIKELY** to return to sport after an ACL injury compared to men and boys, though the reasons for this are complex and involve physical, psychological, and social factors.



Players who have a second ACL injury may have **WORSE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES.** They are less likely to return to sport than after their first ACL injury.



FEAR OF INJURY

may change behaviour that ultimately puts players at greater risk or may cause them to drop out of football



PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS

is associated with return to sport, independent of physical recovery.



Long term, women and girls report **LOWER SELF-REPORTED KNEE FUNCTION AND QUALITY OF LIFE** after ACL injury than men and boys. This may be partly due to less access to support and resources in women's football compared to men's.



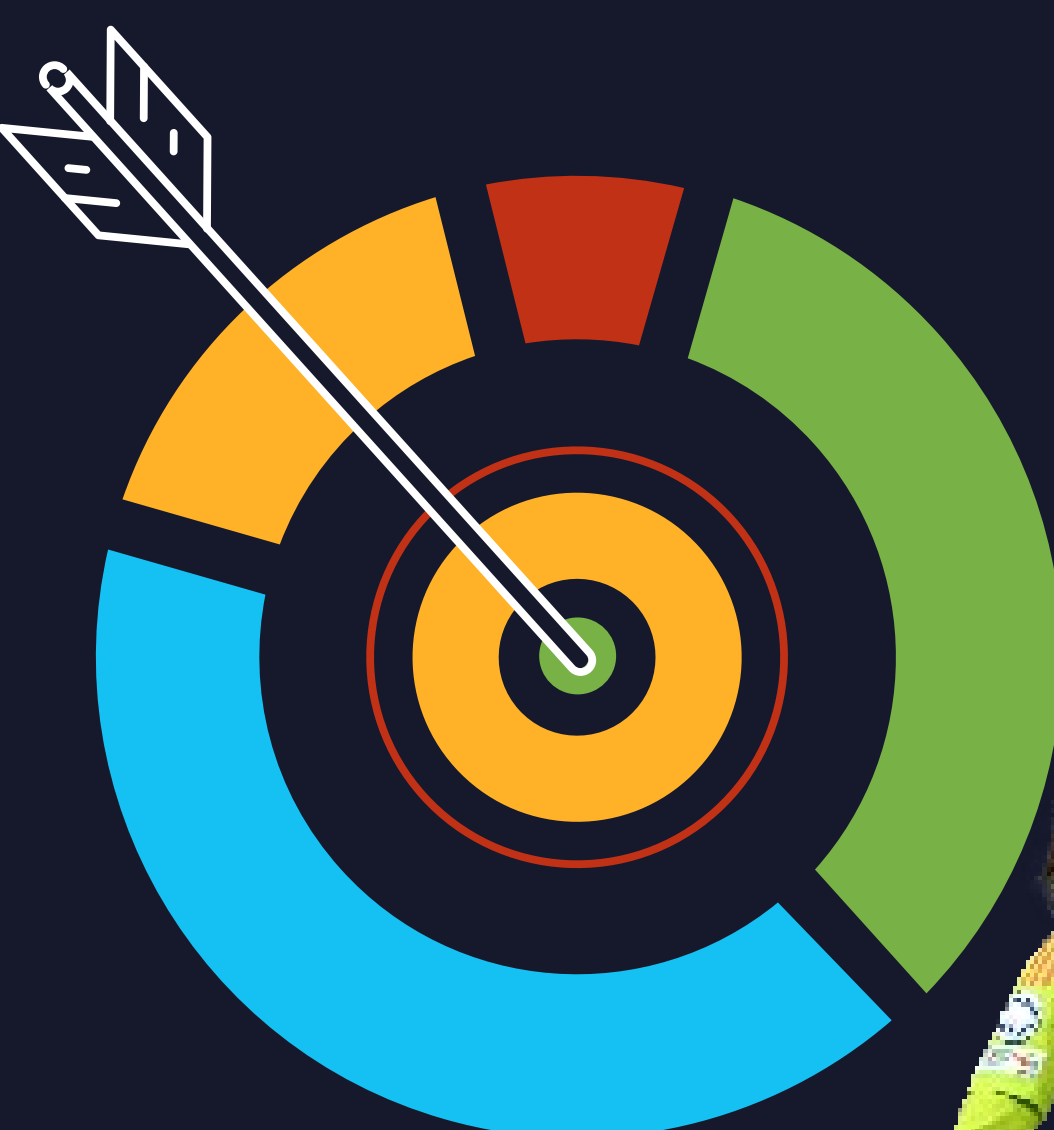
Take home messages

1



Fear negatively affects ACL injury risk perceptions and recovery outcomes, so realistic messages and positive reframing are important.

2



Supporting active coping strategies (like **goal setting** and staying involved with the team) can **improve** recovery experiences.

3



Providing personalised training and rehabilitation plans, allowing athletes some control over their **own journey**, can **improve** ACL injury recovery and **long-term** outcomes.

References

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