swelling after acl reconstruction surgery

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery is a common and expected postoperative symptom that patients often experience. This swelling occurs as a natural response to the surgical trauma and the body's healing process. Understanding the causes, typical timeline, and management strategies for swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery is essential for optimizing recovery and preventing complications. This article explores the various factors contributing to postoperative swelling, the signs to monitor, and effective treatments to reduce edema in the knee area. Additionally, it covers preventive measures and rehabilitation considerations to ensure a safe and efficient healing journey. Readers will gain comprehensive insights into managing swelling post-ACL reconstruction, promoting better outcomes and mobility.

Causes of Swelling After ACL Reconstruction Surgery

Swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery primarily results from the body’s inflammatory response to surgical trauma. When the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) is reconstructed, tissues around the knee, including muscles, ligaments, and blood vessels, sustain microscopic injuries. This triggers an influx of fluids, white blood cells, and other healing factors to the site, causing visible swelling or edema. Additionally, the surgical procedure involves incisions and often the use of grafts, which further contribute to localized inflammation.

Other factors that can exacerbate swelling include bleeding within the joint (hemarthrosis), lymphatic drainage disruption, and prolonged immobility after surgery. Patients with preexisting conditions such as obesity or vascular issues may also experience more pronounced swelling. Understanding these causes helps clinicians and patients anticipate and address swelling effectively during the postoperative phase.

Inflammatory Response and Tissue Trauma

The inflammatory response is a natural defense mechanism that initiates healing. Following ACL reconstruction, the release of cytokines and other inflammatory mediators increases vascular permeability, allowing fluids and immune cells to accumulate in the affected tissues. This results in swelling, redness, and warmth around the knee joint.

Bleeding and Hemarthrosis

During surgery, small blood vessels are cut, which can lead to bleeding inside the joint space. Hemarthrosis contributes to swelling by filling the knee cavity with blood, increasing intra-articular pressure and discomfort. Prompt recognition and management are crucial to prevent excessive joint distension and potential complications.

Typical Timeline and Duration of Postoperative Swelling

Swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery typically follows a predictable timeline tied to the phases of wound healing and rehabilitation. Immediately after surgery, swelling peaks within the first 48 to 72 hours due to acute inflammation and surgical insult. This is the period when patients often experience the most significant edema and discomfort.

Over the following two to three weeks, swelling gradually decreases as the inflammation subsides and lymphatic drainage improves. However, some residual swelling may persist for several months, especially after increased activity or physical therapy sessions. Chronic or prolonged swelling beyond three months warrants evaluation for complications such as infection or joint effusion.

Acute Phase (0-72 Hours)

During the acute postoperative phase, the body initiates hemostasis and inflammation. Patients should expect noticeable swelling, often accompanied by pain and limited range of motion. Immediate postoperative care focuses on minimizing edema and controlling pain.

Subacute Phase (3 Days to 3 Weeks)

Swelling begins to decrease gradually, but the knee may still appear enlarged compared to the uninjured side. Gentle mobilization and adherence to rehabilitation protocols help facilitate fluid resorption and tissue healing during this phase.

Signs and Symptoms to Monitor

Recognizing normal versus abnormal swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery is essential for timely intervention. Typical symptoms associated with postoperative swelling include a visibly enlarged knee, tightness, and stiffness. The skin may feel warm and appear shiny due to fluid accumulation. Mild to moderate pain often accompanies swelling but should improve progressively.

Patients and healthcare providers must be vigilant for signs indicating complications, such as excessive swelling, severe pain, redness extending beyond the knee, fever, or drainage from the surgical site. These symptoms may signal infection, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), or other adverse events requiring prompt medical attention.

Normal Swelling Characteristics

- Mild to moderate increase in knee circumference
- Warmth localized to the surgical area
- Improvement with elevation and rest
- Reduction following ice application

Warning Signs of Complications

- Rapidly increasing swelling despite treatment
- Persistent or worsening pain
- Redness spreading from the incision site
- Fever or chills
- Unusual drainage or foul odor from wounds
- Calf pain or tenderness suggestive of DVT

Effective Management and Treatment Strategies

Managing swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery involves a combination of non-pharmacologic and pharmacologic approaches aimed at reducing

inflammation, promoting circulation, and facilitating healing. Early intervention is key to minimizing discomfort and preventing prolonged edema that can impede rehabilitation progress.

Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation (RICE)

The RICE protocol remains the cornerstone of initial swelling management. Rest limits further tissue injury, ice application reduces blood flow and inflammation, compression garments or bandages help prevent fluid accumulation, and elevation promotes venous and lymphatic return.

- **Rest:** Avoid weight-bearing activities initially as directed by the surgeon.
- **Ice:** Apply cold packs for 15-20 minutes every 2-3 hours during the first 48-72 hours.
- **Compression:** Use elastic bandages or knee sleeves to provide gentle pressure.
- **Elevation:** Keep the leg elevated above heart level whenever possible.

Medications and Physical Therapy

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may be prescribed to control pain and reduce inflammation. Physical therapy plays a critical role in gradually restoring knee function while minimizing swelling through controlled exercises and manual lymphatic drainage techniques.

Advanced Interventions

In cases where swelling is severe or persistent, additional interventions may be necessary. These include joint aspiration to remove excess fluid, the use of compression pumps, or evaluation for complications such as infection. Close collaboration with the orthopedic surgeon and rehabilitation team ensures tailored treatment plans.

Prevention and Rehabilitation Considerations

Preventing excessive swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery depends on adherence to postoperative guidelines and gradual progression of physical activity. Patient education on the importance of early mobilization, proper wound care, and symptom monitoring is vital. Rehabilitation protocols are designed to balance tissue healing with functional restoration, minimizing

the risk of recurrent edema.

Early Mobilization and Exercise

Initiating gentle range-of-motion exercises within the first week post-surgery promotes circulation and reduces fluid buildup. Weight-bearing status is adjusted based on surgical technique and graft type. Physical therapists guide patients through individualized programs to enhance strength and flexibility while controlling swelling.

Lifestyle and Supportive Measures

Additional measures to prevent swelling include maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding prolonged standing or sitting, and using supportive devices such as crutches or braces as recommended. Proper nutrition and hydration support overall healing and immune function.

Patient Compliance and Follow-Up

Regular follow-up appointments allow healthcare providers to assess swelling progression and adjust treatment plans. Patient compliance with prescribed therapies and activity restrictions is crucial for optimal outcomes. Prompt reporting of abnormal symptoms ensures early detection of complications.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery normal?

Yes, swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery is normal and expected as part of the body's healing process. It usually peaks within the first few days and gradually decreases over several weeks.

How long does swelling typically last after ACL reconstruction?

Swelling can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months after ACL reconstruction. Most patients notice significant reduction in swelling within 4 to 6 weeks, but some residual swelling may persist longer, especially after physical activity.

What are effective ways to reduce swelling after ACL

reconstruction surgery?

To reduce swelling, patients are advised to use the R.I.C.E method (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation), take prescribed anti-inflammatory medications, and follow their physical therapy regimen. Avoiding excessive activity and keeping the leg elevated can also help.

When should I be concerned about swelling after ACL surgery?

If swelling is accompanied by severe pain, redness, warmth, fever, or if it suddenly worsens, it may indicate infection or blood clot and requires immediate medical attention.

Can physical therapy help with swelling after ACL reconstruction?

Yes, physical therapy can help manage swelling by promoting circulation and lymphatic drainage through guided exercises. Therapists may also use modalities like compression and manual lymphatic drainage techniques.

Does swelling after ACL surgery affect recovery time?

Swelling itself is a normal part of healing, but excessive or prolonged swelling can delay mobility and rehabilitation progress, potentially extending recovery time. Managing swelling effectively is important for optimal recovery.

Are there any medications that can help control swelling after ACL reconstruction?

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen are often recommended to help reduce pain and swelling after surgery. Always follow your surgeon’s advice regarding medication use.

Can swelling after ACL reconstruction surgery return after initial improvement?

Yes, swelling can recur after initial improvement, especially after increased activity or exercise. It is important to pace activity levels and use appropriate swelling management techniques to prevent flare-ups.

Additional Resources

1. *Managing Swelling After ACL Reconstruction: A Comprehensive Guide*
This book offers an in-depth look at the causes and treatment of swelling following ACL reconstruction surgery. It covers practical strategies including physical therapy techniques, medication options, and lifestyle adjustments to reduce inflammation. Patients and healthcare professionals will find valuable advice on managing post-operative recovery effectively.

2. *Post-ACL Surgery Recovery: Understanding and Controlling Swelling*
Focused on the recovery phase after ACL surgery, this book explains the biological mechanisms behind swelling and how it impacts healing. It includes step-by-step protocols for icing, compression, elevation, and exercises that help minimize fluid buildup. The author also discusses when to seek medical intervention for persistent or severe swelling.

3. *Swelling and Inflammation After ACL Reconstruction: Causes and Treatments*
This text delves into the medical and physiological reasons for swelling after ACL surgery, highlighting common complications. It reviews both traditional and innovative treatment methods, such as lymphatic drainage and anti-inflammatory therapies. The book is designed for patients, therapists, and surgeons looking to optimize recovery outcomes.

4. *The ACL Rehab Handbook: Managing Swelling and Pain Post-Surgery*
A practical manual for patients undergoing ACL reconstruction recovery, this book emphasizes managing swelling alongside pain control. It outlines daily care routines, rehabilitation exercises, and the importance of nutrition and hydration. The author provides motivational tips to help patients stay consistent in their recovery efforts.

5. *Healing After ACL Surgery: Strategies to Reduce Swelling and Promote Mobility*
This book offers a holistic approach to post-ACL surgery recovery, focusing on swelling reduction and restoring joint mobility. It integrates physical therapy advice with lifestyle and dietary recommendations to support tissue healing. Readers will learn about the timeline of swelling and how to track progress effectively.

6. *Swelling Management in Sports Medicine: Insights from ACL Reconstruction Cases*
Targeted at sports medicine professionals, this book presents case studies related to swelling management after ACL reconstruction. It discusses diagnostic tools, intervention strategies, and rehabilitation plans tailored to athletes. The content bridges clinical research with practical applications in sports injury recovery.

7. *From Surgery to Strength: Overcoming Swelling After ACL Reconstruction*
This motivational guide combines medical information with personal stories of patients who successfully managed swelling after ACL surgery. It highlights mental health aspects and coping mechanisms during the recovery process. The book encourages a proactive mindset to overcome common post-surgical

challenges.

8. *Advanced Therapies for Swelling Control Post-ACL Surgery*
Focusing on cutting-edge treatments, this book reviews advanced modalities such as electrical stimulation, ultrasound therapy, and pharmaceutical interventions to control swelling. It also evaluates the effectiveness and safety of these options based on recent clinical trials. Healthcare providers will find this resource useful for enhancing patient care.

9. *Understanding and Preventing Complications: Swelling After ACL Reconstruction*
This book addresses the potential complications arising from excessive swelling post ACL surgery, including infection and joint stiffness. It provides guidelines for early detection and prevention strategies to safeguard patient health. The comprehensive approach ensures both patients and clinicians are informed about best practices in post-operative care.

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swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Postsurgical Orthopedic Sports Rehabilitation* Robert C. Manske, 2006-01-01 Written by well-known experts in a reader-friendly style, this is the only book to focus specifically on post-surgical guidelines for successful rehabilitation of the knee and shoulder for sports patients. Content covers basic concepts related to soft tissue healing, as well as core concepts in sports medicine rehabilitation, all of which lay the groundwork for discussions of specific protocols. Detailed descriptions of the latest post-surgical procedures for various knee and shoulder pathologies equip readers with essential knowledge needed to recommend the most effective treatment plans. Includes a separate section on multiple ligament knee injuries. Numerous photos and radiographs of topics discussed in the text serve as excellent visual references in the clinical setting. Detailed descriptions of the most current surgical protocols for various knee and shoulder pathologies help readers recommend the best treatment based on proven rehabilitation plans. The inflammatory response is described, with regard to its role in soft tissue healing following surgical procedures of the knee and shoulder. Protocols based on the most recent research available promotes evidence-based practice. A chapter on rotator cuff injuries includes authoritative, up-to-date information on this topic. A chapter on cartilage replacement focuses on the nuts and bolts of rehabilitation for this common injury, offering current, hands-on information about one of the fastest changing treatment protocols. Contributors are expert therapists and physicians - respected leaders in their field. Each chapter highlights post-op guidelines and protocols in a consistent format that's immediately accessible and easy to reference. Comprehensive information on soft tissue healing is presented. A separate section on multiple ligament knee injuries presents hard-to-find information that's rarely covered in other resources or literature.

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Return to Sport after ACL Reconstruction and Other Knee Operations* Frank R. Noyes, Sue Barber-Westin, 2019-11-05 The wealth of information

provided in this unique text will enable orthopedic surgeons, medical practitioners, physical therapists, and trainers to ensure that athletes who suffer anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries, or who require major knee operations for other reasons, have the best possible chance of safely resuming sporting activity at their desired level without subsequent problems. Divided into seven thematic sections, the coverage is wide-ranging and encompasses common barriers to return to sport, return to sport decision-based models, and the complete spectrum of optimal treatment for ACL injuries, including preoperative and postoperative rehabilitation. Advanced training concepts are explained in detail, with description of sports-specific programs for soccer, basketball, and tennis. Readers will find detailed guidance on objective testing for muscle strength, neuromuscular function, neurocognitive function, and cardiovascular fitness, as well as validated assessments to identify and manage psychological issues. In addition, return to sport considerations after meniscus surgery, patellofemoral realignment, articular cartilage procedures, and knee arthroplasty are discussed. Generously illustrated and heavily referenced, Return to Sport after ACL Reconstruction and Other Knee Operations is a comprehensive resource for all medical professionals and support staff working with athletes and active patients looking to get back in the game with confidence.

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: The ACL-Deficient Knee Vicente Sanchis-Alfonso, Joan Carles Monllau, 2012-12-18 This book approaches the ACL deficient knee from a different perspective than those of the previous classical ways. The common approach is the analysis of closed compartments; anatomy, biomechanics, physical findings, imaging, surgical treatment and rehabilitation. The approach of this book is completely opposite, focusing on questions, controversies, problem analyses and problem solving, besides analyzing the possibility of prevention. Therefore, in each chapter, the biomechanics, anatomy, and other areas that are relevant to the topic are reviewed. There are chapters where highly specialized surgical techniques are presented (acute ACL repair, double bundle reconstruction, chondral lesions treatment or meniscal transplant). These chapters are written by internationally renowned specialists that are pioneers in the topic analyzed. Another interesting aspect of this book are the step by step surgical techniques videos, that will allow a knee specialist to perform the technique presented by the author. Moreover, the videos will include anatomy and physical therapy techniques.

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Controversies in ACL Reconstruction, An Issue of Clinics in Sports Medicine* Darren L. Johnson, 2016-11-23 ACL reconstruction remains one of the most common orthopedic procedures performed today. This issue will discuss controversies that can arise. Articles to be included are: Diagnosis of ACL Injury: Epidemiology, mechanism of injury patterns, history, PE, and ancillary test findings including x-ray and MRI; Anatomy of the ACL: Gross, arthroscopic, and Radiographic as a basis of ACL surgery; Graft selection in ACL surgery: Who gets what and why; Management of the ACL injured knee in the skeletally immature athlete; Indications for Two-incision (outside in) ACL Surgery and many more exciting articles!

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Pathology and Intervention in Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation* David J. Magee, James E. Zachazewski, William S. Quillen, 2008-01-01 Design and implement a rehab program on your own with Pathology and Intervention in Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation, 2nd Edition. Part of Magee's popular Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation Series, this pathology text for physical therapists provides clear guidance on patient management relative to specific musculoskeletal pathology, injury, and illness - all based on a sound understanding of basic science and principles of practice. It focuses on the specific pathologies most often seen in the clinic, and discusses the best methods for intervention for the different areas of the body in the context of the tissue-healing model. Each intervention features a rationale, along with the pathology and problem presented; stage of healing; evidence in the literature; and clinical reasoning considerations. Dedicated and focused information on the specific pathologies most often seen in the clinic, as well as the best methods for intervention for the different areas of the body, minimizes duplication of information by referring you to other titles in the Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation Series for basic scientific information regarding inflammation, healing, tissue deformation, and the development of muscular strength and endurance. Trusted experts in musculoskeletal rehabilitation,

along with internationally recognized contributors, present the best evidence behind contemporary interventions directed toward the treatment of the impairments and functional limitations associated with acute, chronic, and congenital musculoskeletal conditions occurring across the lifespan. Evidence-based content, with over 4,000 references, supports the scientific principles for rehabilitation interventions, providing the best evidence for the management of musculoskeletal pathology and injury. NEW! The Skin and Wound Healing chapter looks at the numerous tools available to assist in objectively monitoring and treating a patient with an acute or chronic wound. NEW! Rotator Cuff Pathology chapter highlights the anatomy, function, and etiology of the rotary cuff, and addresses rotary cuff injuries, physical examination, and non-operative and operative treatment. UPDATED! Substantially revised chapter on the Thoracic Ring ApproachT facilitates clinical reasoning for the treatment of the thoracic spine and ribs through the assessment and treatment of thoracic spine disorders and how they relate to the whole kinetic chain. UPDATED! Revised Lumbar Spine - Treatment of Motor Control Disorders chapter explores some of the research evidence and clinical reasoning pertaining to instability of the lumbar spine so you can better organize your knowledge for immediate use in the clinical setting. UPDATED! Significantly revised chapter on the treatment of pelvic pain and dysfunction presents an overview of specific pathologies pertaining to the various systems of the pelvis - and highlights how The Integrated Systems Model for Disability and Pain facilitates evidence-based management of the often complex patient with pelvic pain and dysfunction. NEW! Musculoskeletal Bone and Soft Tissue Tumors chapter covers common bones tumors, anatomic considerations and rehabilitation, pediatric patients, and amputation related to cancer. UPDATED! Thoroughly revised chapters with additional references ensure you get the most recent evidence and information available. NEW! Full color design and illustration program reflects what you see in the physical world to help you recognize and understand concepts more quickly.

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guidance you need to effectively select the right procedure and equipment, prevent complications, and improve outcomes for every patient. Written and edited by world leaders in hamstring, allograft, and bone-patellar tendon-bone (BTB) ACL reconstruction, this revised reference is a must-have resource for the full range of anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction techniques, plus fixation devices, rehabilitation, revision ACLR surgery, and much more! - Covers the latest clinical and technical information on pain control, genetics and biologics, the use of ultrasound, and much more. - EBook access features an exhaustive ACL bibliography database more than 5000 available articles. - Features dozens of new chapters that offer up-to-date information on pain control after ACLR, single vs. double bundle repairs, genetics and collagen type, all-inside techniques, biologics, pediatrics, ACL ganglion cysts, prognosis for ACLR success, allografts vs. autografts, and more. - Provides the experience and insight of a dream team of ACL experts, including James Andrews on sports medicine, Frank Noyes on HTO and ACLR, and Andrew Amis on the benefits of the older femoral tunnel placement technique. - Expert ConsultTM eBook version included with purchase. This enhanced eBook experience allows you to search all of the text, figures, Q&As, and references from the book on a variety of devices.

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swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Instructions for Sports Medicine Patients E-Book* Marc Safran, James E. Zachazewski, David A. Stone, 2011-08-31 Instructions for Sports Medicine Patients provides step-by-step guidance for your patients to save time and eliminate the risk of miscommunication. Marc Safran and James E. Zachazewski present the combined perspectives of both an orthopaedic sports medicine physician and a physical therapist for a balanced approach to therapeutic practices. The updated second edition covers additional topics so that you stay current and have the best treatment options at your fingertips. You'll have over 300 rehabilitation exercises with detailed drawings and descriptions, all downloadable from www.expertconsult.com. Ensure that your patients comply with therapeutic instructions and recover more quickly from chronic ankle instability, tennis elbow, and more. - Access the fully searchable contents on CD, along with all

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swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Current Concepts in ACL Reconstruction* Freddie H. Fu, Steven B. Cohen (M.D.), 2008 From evaluation to outcome, Current Concepts in ACL Reconstruction will help you keep pace with the latest techniques for the treatment of anterior cruciate ligament injuries. This text provides the most complete and up-to-date information for the surgical reconstruction of a torn ACL including details about the newer double-bundle procedure. Both American and international perspectives on the treatment of ACL injuries are included to

provide the most comprehensive review on the market today. Inside this richly illustrated text, Drs. Freddie H. Fu and Steven B. Cohen along with contributions from the world's most experienced knee surgeons review the basic science, kinematic, imaging, and injury patterns surrounding the ACL. Surgical concepts, various techniques for reconstruction, and diverse opinions on approaching the ACL are also included. Current Concepts in ACL Reconstruction explains the anatomical basis in order to provide the most current surgical principles to ensure the patient receives the best surgical outcomes. To reflect recent advancements in ACL treatment, the emerging double-bundle technique is comprehensively covered. The differences between the single- and double-bundle techniques are discussed with perspectives from leading international experts in double-bundle reconstruction. An accompanying video CD-ROM demonstrates the various procedures mentioned throughout the text. In addition, several of the world's most experienced surgeons provide their perspective from what they have learned by performing ACL surgery for over 25 years, along with their insight into the future treatment of ACL injuries. What you will want to learn more about: - Differences between single- and double-bundle reconstruction techniques - Outcomes of single- and double-bundle reconstruction - Pediatric ACL reconstruction - Gender differences in ACL injury - Radiographic imaging - Computer navigation assistance for ACL reconstruction - Injury patterns of the ACL - Graft choices in ACL surgery - Revision ACL surgery - Postoperative rehabilitation after ACL reconstruction - Outcome measures to assess success after surgery Current Concepts in ACL Reconstruction answers the need for a comprehensive information source on the treatment of ACL injuries. Orthopedic residents and surgeons will be prepared with this thorough review of ACL reconstruction by their side.

swelling after acl reconstruction surgery: *Manual Therapy for Musculoskeletal Pain Syndromes* Cesar Fernandez de las Penas, Joshua Cleland, Jan Dommerholt, 2015-04-28 A pioneering, one-stop manual which harvests the best proven approaches from physiotherapy research and practice to assist the busy clinician in real-life screening, diagnosis and management of patients with musculoskeletal pain across the whole body. Led by an experienced editorial team, the chapter authors have integrated both their clinical experience and expertise with reasoning based on a neurophysiologic rationale with the most updated evidence. The textbook is divided into eleven sections, covering the top evidence-informed techniques in massage, trigger points, neural muscle energy, manipulations, dry needling, myofascial release, therapeutic exercise and psychological approaches. In the General Introduction, several authors review the epidemiology of upper and lower extremity pain syndromes and the process of taking a comprehensive history in patients affected by pain. In Chapter 5, the basic principles of the physical examination are covered, while Chapter 6 places the field of manual therapy within the context of contemporary pain neurosciences and therapeutic neuroscience education. For the remaining sections, the textbook alternates between the upper and lower quadrants. Sections 2 and 3 provide state-of-the-art updates on mechanical neck pain, whiplash, thoracic outlet syndrome, myelopathy, radiculopathy, peri-partum pelvic pain, joint mobilizations and manipulations and therapeutic exercises, among others. Sections 4 to 9 review pertinent and updated aspects of the shoulder, hip, elbow, knee, the wrist and hand, and finally the ankle and foot. The last two sections of the book are devoted to muscle referred pain and neurodynamics. - The only one-stop manual detailing examination and treatment of the most commonly seen pain syndromes supported by accurate scientific and clinical data - Over 800 illustrations demonstrating examination procedures and techniques - Led by an expert editorial team and contributed by internationally-renowned researchers, educators and clinicians - Covers epidemiology and history-taking - Highly practical with a constant clinical emphasis

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