

**Patient
Information**

Fractured clavicle and acromioclavicular (AC) joint injuries

Introduction

This leaflet has been given to you because you have injured your shoulder. An X-ray suggests that you have fractured your clavicle (sometimes known as your collar bone) or injured your acromioclavicular (AC) joint. The AC joint is where your clavicle meets your shoulder.

What are these injuries?

Both a fractured clavicle and an AC joint injury usually happen when you fall onto the edge of your shoulder or due to a collision with another player during contact sports such as rugby or football.

These injuries may also occur following a fall onto an elbow or outstretched arm. In these instances, forces are transmitted up through the arm and into the shoulder. If the forces are severe enough, they may cause the clavicle to break or the AC joint to become damaged.

What is a fractured clavicle?

A fractured clavicle is a break, or bend, in your collar bone. This is one of the most common fractures seen in sport.



Figure 1: Position of the clavicle

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Treatment for a fractured clavicle

This is a painful injury which is usually treated without surgery, even in cases where the bone appears out of place. Treatment is aimed at reducing pain and holding the bones steady to help with healing.

To help keep your shoulder still, we will apply a broad arm sling which we recommend you use for up to 2 weeks

It is not possible to completely immobilise (stop from moving) this bone. Therefore, while the fracture is healing, the large range arm movements should be avoided and they will be painful.

If the bones are particularly out of place you may be referred to the Trauma Service who will advise you about further treatment options.

What is an AC joint injury?

An AC joint injury is also known as a 'shoulder separation'. This is not the same as a shoulder dislocation.



Figure 2: AC joint injury

The AC joint is at the top of your shoulder between your clavicle and your scapula (shoulder blade). It allows you to move your arm over your head and across your body.

There are a number of ligaments (which are similar to elastic bands) around the joint to keep it stable. Most injuries happen when these ligaments are overstretched. The amount of damage can vary from a mild sprain to a complete tear.

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AC joint injury treatment

Most patients with an AC joint injury start to feel better within a week of the injury. However, full ligament healing will take at least 8 weeks. During this time it is important to protect your AC joint ligaments from overstretching the newly formed scar tissue. It can be helpful at first to use a broad arm sling for 1 to 2 weeks as this will reduce the strain on your AC joint. Regular pain relief such as paracetamol is recommended. Please follow the instructions on the pack.

Contact sports (such as football, rugby and basketball) should be avoided for 6 weeks.

Follow up for fractured clavicle and an injured AC joint

If you notice any sudden shortness of breath or weakness developing in your hand or arm, please contact NHS 111 for advice.

All X-rays are looked at by our radiologists. If there is any concern that there may be a more serious injury, you will be contacted and asked to come in for a follow up appointment.

These injuries usually heal well and no further treatment is needed, making a routine follow-up appointment unnecessary.

Contact information

If you have any worries or concerns please contact:

Trauma Service

Tel: 0300 422 5269

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 2:00pm

Email: ghn-tr.glostrauma@nhs.net

NHS 111

Tel: 111

Further information

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk

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