

**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.

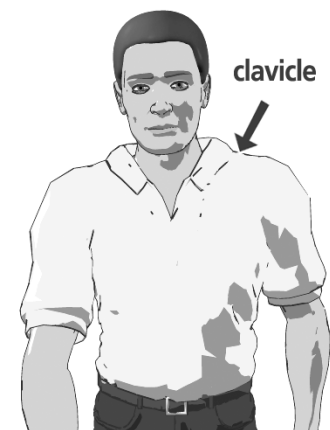
What are these injuries?

Both a fractured clavicle and an AC joint injury usually happen when you fall onto the edge of your shoulder during sport such as rugby or football. It can also happen if you fall with your arm outstretched.

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.



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.

Reference No.

GHPI0034_07_24

Department

Emergency

Review due

July 2027

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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, large or wide arm movements should be avoided as 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.

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.



Figure 1: AC joint injury

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.

Any X-rays taken will be reviewed by our radiologists. If there is any concern that there may be a more serious injury, you will be contacted and may be asked to attend a follow up appointment. However, if your symptoms become worse or you have any concerns, please seek advice from the one of the services listed at the end of this leaflet.

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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 the damaged ligaments from overstretching the healing ligaments. It can be helpful to use a broad arm sling for 1 to 2 weeks as this will reduce the strain on your AC joint.

Managing the pain

Both injuries are painful and regular pain relief, such as paracetamol, is recommended. Please follow the dosage instruction in the pack. Your local pharmacist can advise you if you are taking other medication.

Important information

Rarely, a broken collar bone can cause more serious injuries which need urgent treatment. We advise you to contact NHS 111 or return to your local Emergency Department if you:

- have chest pain.
- have difficulty breathing.
- are coughing up blood.
- have a bone sticking out of your skin.
- have pins and needles in your arm or hand.

Follow up

These injuries usually heal well and no further treatment is needed. A follow-up appointment is not necessary.

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

Contact information

If you have any concerns about your injury, please seek advice from either of the following:

Trauma Service

Tel: 0300 422 5269

Monday to Friday, 10:00am to 2:00pm

Email: ghn-tr.glostrauma@nhs.net

Patient Information

NHS 111
Tel: 111

Further information

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-collarbone/

Content reviewed: July 2024

Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>