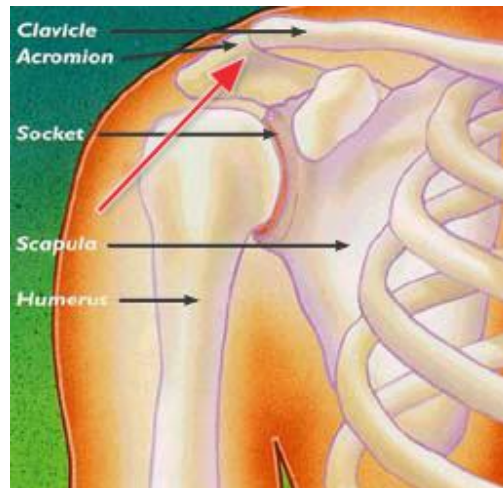


Acromioclavicular (AC) Joint Injury

What is it?

An acromioclavicular or AC joint injury refers to the joint between the end of your collarbone (clavicle) and the upper part of your shoulder blade (acromion).



How does it happen?

The AC joint is usually injured following an impact of the shoulder. This impact can push the upper part of the blade beneath the end of the collarbone. This can injure the capsule surrounding the AC joint and the ligaments which support the joint.

How does it feel?

The first sensation felt when the AC joint is injured is pain experienced on the top of the shoulder. Depending on the severity of the injury there may be an obvious deformity or bump. This is due to either displacement of the bones forming the joint or early bleeding and swelling around the injured structures.

What should you do?

If you have or suspect you have injured your AC joint, it is advised to cease participating and begin initial treatment. To control the amount of swelling and limit the degree of damage to the injured tissues, the shoulder should be rested and iced. If the pain is strong you may use a sling to support the arm and reduce the tension on the injured structures. Icing involves applying ice to the injured site for 15-20 minutes every 1-2 hours. Ideally, it should be applied using crushed ice wrapped in a moist cloth or towel. You should continue this until you consult a physiotherapist.

What shouldn't you do?

In the first few days following AC joint injury you should adopt the NO HARM approach. This includes **NO** Heat, **A**lcohol, **R**unning or **M**assage. These can prolong bleeding and exaggerate swelling resulting in further pain and an extended recovery.

Could there be long-term effects?

Most AC joint injuries heal without complication within a matter of weeks. However, a proportion of injuries can result in longer-term effects. In more serious injuries recovery may be prolonged due to the extent and severity of damage to the injured tissues. Similarly in more minor tears, recovery may be prolonged if the tear is not appropriately managed. This may result in ongoing shoulder pain and increased risk of re-injury when you return to participation.

Management

The assistance of a physiotherapist is important in the treatment of an AC injury. Initially they can assist in diagnosing the injury and the extent of the damage. From this the physio will be able to provide you with a determination of how long the injury is expected to take to heal and determine an appropriate treatment program. Treatment may consist of massage, ultrasound therapy, TENS or IFT, range of motion and strength exercises and strapping tape.