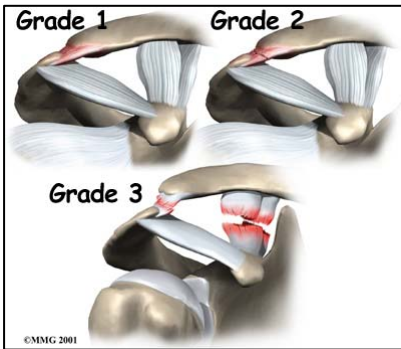


Acromioclavicular (AC) joint injury



What is it?

An acromioclavicular or AC joint injury refers to an injury 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 to the point of the shoulder. The impact may be with a stationary object, such as the ground or wall, or with a moving object, such as an opponent. This impact can push the upper part of the shoulder 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. This pain may be strong enough to stop you from using the injured arm and may cause you to cradle the arm close to your body. Depending on the severity of the injury, when you look at the site where the pain is coming from 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?

- It is advised you cease participating in activities and begin initial treatment.
- The most important time in the treatment of an AC joint injury is the first 24–48 hours. This is when bleeding and swelling around the injured tissues is most active. Although swelling is a necessary step in the healing process, too much can delay healing and cause further tissue damage. To control the amount of swelling and limit the degree of damage to the injured tissues, the shoulder should be **rested and iced**.
- **Rest** involves ceasing to participate and limiting the use of the injured arm. 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 for 1-2 days until you consult a North City Physiotherapist.**

What shouldn't you do?

- In the first few days following AC joint injury, you shouldn't undertake activities which increase blood flow to the injured tissues.
- These include hot showers, heat rubs, massage, the consumption of alcohol and excessive use of the arm. These can prolong bleeding and exaggerate swelling resulting in further pain and an extended recovery.

Could there be any 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 an increased risk of reinjury when you return to your activity or sport.

What NORTH CITY PHYSIO CAN DO TO HELP:

- **The assistance of a North City Physiotherapist is important in the treatment of an AC joint injury.**
- Initially, they can assist in diagnosing the injury and the extent of the damage. This may require the use of an X-ray to exclude damage to the bones.
- From this, the North City Physiotherapist 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. This may involve the use of a sling to help with your pain, the use of ultrasound therapy and soft tissue therapy to assist with the healing of the injured tissues
- A series of exercises including stretching and strengthening will be designed to return you back to activity and sport and reduce the risk of reinjury.
- A North City Physiotherapist will also be able to advise you on other preventive measures, such as the use of strapping tape.