

Title: What is an acromioclavicular separation?

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Abstract: A patient's guide to acromioclavicular separation injuries, including information about symptoms and various forms of treatment. The choice between surgical and conservative treatment depends on the severity of the injury and the functional goals of the patient. Therefore it is important for patients to work with their health care providers to determine the best course of treatment for their injury.

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advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.



While your injury is healing, it is important to take care of yourself.

Work with your healthcare team to figure out when and how you will best recover and return to your normal activities.

Don't get discouraged! It may take two to four weeks to heal a mild AC separation. It may take more than two months to heal from a severe AC separation injury.

For more information on AC separation injuries, please visit:

Uptodate for patients

<http://www.uptodate.com/patients/content/topic.do?topicKey=~8Xm8h.pwl70pNy>

Mayo clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/separated-shoulder/DS00933>

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What is an acromioclavicular (AC) separation injury?



An AC separation injury is commonly called a shoulder separation.

AC separations can result from **a car accident, a sports injury, or a fall.**

It happens when a forceful blow or a fall **causes your collarbone (clavicle) to be forced away from the top end of your shoulder bone (acromion).**

If you have had a shoulder injury, **see your doctor.** Tell your doctor what happened. Your doctor will **examine your shoulder** and may take **x-rays.** Your doctor will also **check for other injuries.**

It is **important that you develop a plan with your doctor** about your recovery from an AC separation.

Describe what kinds of physical activities you normally do. Work with your doctor to form your goal for your recovery.

Ask questions if you are unsure about anything. Make sure you review the risks and complications, as well as the benefits and potential outcomes, of your treatment.

An AC separation is a **soft tissue injury**.

The **ligaments** that hold your shoulder bone and collarbone together are **either stretched or torn**.

AC separations **do not involve the shoulder joint** that attaches your shoulder to your upper arm bone.

AC separations are **not breaks** (fractures) of any of the surrounding bones.

Symptoms from an AC separation injury can **range from a little soreness and pain to extreme pain and a large bump**.

If you have an AC separation you might experience:

- **Pain and soreness** at the top of your shoulder.
- **Swelling and bruising** at the top of your shoulder.
- **A bump or lump** above your shoulder.
- **Limited movement** at the top of your shoulder.

In a **mild** AC shoulder separation:

- The **ligaments** that hold your bones in place **are stretched**.
- Your collarbone and shoulder bone have not moved out of place or have only moved a small bit.

A mild AC separation generally does not need surgery.



In a **more severe** AC shoulder separation:

- The **stabilizing ligaments are torn**.
- Your collarbone moves out of place, which may cause a bump or lump at the top of your shoulder.

In a severe separation, you and your doctor may decide to include surgery as part of your treatment.

Whether you have a mild or severe AC separation, treatment usually begins with:

- **Resting your shoulder.** You might be given a sling to hold your shoulder in place. Avoid movements or positions that cause pain.
- **Icing your shoulder** several times a day to keep the swelling down. This will also help reduce the pain.
- **Pain relievers.** Tylenol, Advil, or other medications may help with the pain. Ask your doctor which pain reliever is best for you.



Physical therapy may be prescribed to help you regain your range of motion and strength.