



Acromioclavicular (AC) Joint Sprains

Definition: The acromion (top of shoulder bone) and clavicle (collar bone) form the AC joint. This joint is connected by 2 small ligaments, which are bands that connect bone to bone. An AC joint sprain is when either or both of the ligaments are damaged.

Common terms: AC Joint Sprain, Separated Shoulder, Shoulder sprain

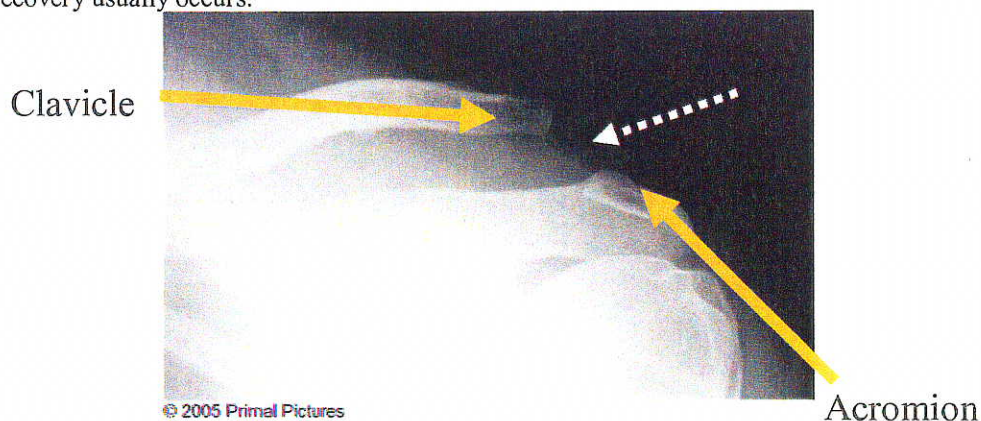
Typical Mechanism of Injury: Direct impact to the shoulder or AC joint such as falling and landing on your shoulder, or falling on an outstretched arm.

Common Signs and Symptoms: An AC joint sprain can receive one of six grades (1 = mild, 6 = severe), depending on the severity of the tear, movement of the collar bone, and involvement of other structures. There will be deformity (the end of the collar bone appears to be sticking upward) The injury is usually very painful and tender to touch, arm movement may be limited and painful, and there might be some swelling.

Common Treatment: A sling may alleviate some discomfort, and x-rays will be taken to determine the extent of the injury. Most sprains are not treated with surgery, unless activities of daily living are being affected. Ice, medication, and the sling will decrease some pain early on after the injury. Supervised rehabilitation is helpful, and recommended in some cases for a full recovery.

Prevention: Ensuring that equipment fits properly in sports, strengthening the shoulder complex, and teaching proper falling techniques all contribute to the prevention of an AC joint sprain.

Expectations: AC joint sprains can recover in days or require surgery depending on severity. All sprains can benefit from a rehabilitation program that mobilizes, strengthens, and increases flexibility in the shoulder. It is not uncommon for pain to last many months following this type of an injury, but a full recovery usually occurs.



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