

Acromioclavicular (AC) Joint Sprain

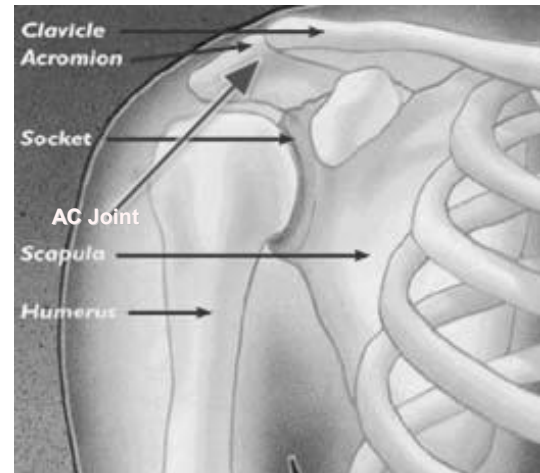
What is an AC joint sprain?

The AC joint is on the top of the shoulder. It is the bump you may feel and see on a bare shoulder. An AC joint sprain is a stretch or partial tear of the ligament that holds the collar bone (clavicle) to the shoulder blade (acromion). It is often called a separated shoulder. Most often, the sprain comes from a direct impact to the top of the shoulder like falling on the shoulder.

What are the symptoms?

There may be:

- Pain when touched on the shoulder area.
- Swelling in the area.
- Pain with moving the arm across the body.
- A noticeable gap between the two bones.



How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will review your activities. The sprain is diagnosed by the location of the pain, symptoms and a physical exam. X-rays are often done to find out the extent of the injury.

How is it treated?

Pain medicine, decreased activity, resting and icing of the shoulder may help with pain and swelling. Other treatments may include:

- A sling to protect the joint.
- Icing. Use a bag of crushed ice, or frozen peas or corn. You can reuse these items as an ice pack. **Do not eat** the corn or peas once they have been used as an ice pack.
 - Put a towel between skin and bag. If you put the ice pack right on the skin, it may cause frost bite. Put the bag on the sore area.
 - Leave on for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Range of motion exercises may be done with help and instructions from a therapist.
- Shoulder strengthening exercises will be given to you by a physical therapist.
- **Avoid** military press, bench press, or move the arm across the body until the therapist says it is ok.

If the joint does not heal like it should, it is more likely to get sprained again. Proper physical therapy may help prevent repeated injuries.

What follow-up is needed?

Most often, follow up with the doctor is needed. Another X-ray may be done to make sure the joint has healed properly.

ALERT: Call your doctor, nurse, or therapist if you have any questions or concerns or if you have special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.