Acromioclavicular Joint Injury

The acromioclavicular joint (or AC joint), is where the collarbone meets the shoulder blade. The AC joint is important in supporting movement of the arm overhead and across the body, pushing, pulling, and lifting.



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AC joint injury can happen later in life from overuse, but most commonly occurs from trauma such as falling on the point of the shoulder or onto an outstretched arm or with collision in sport. When this happens, the ligaments can be torn or stretched, and the bone can fracture.

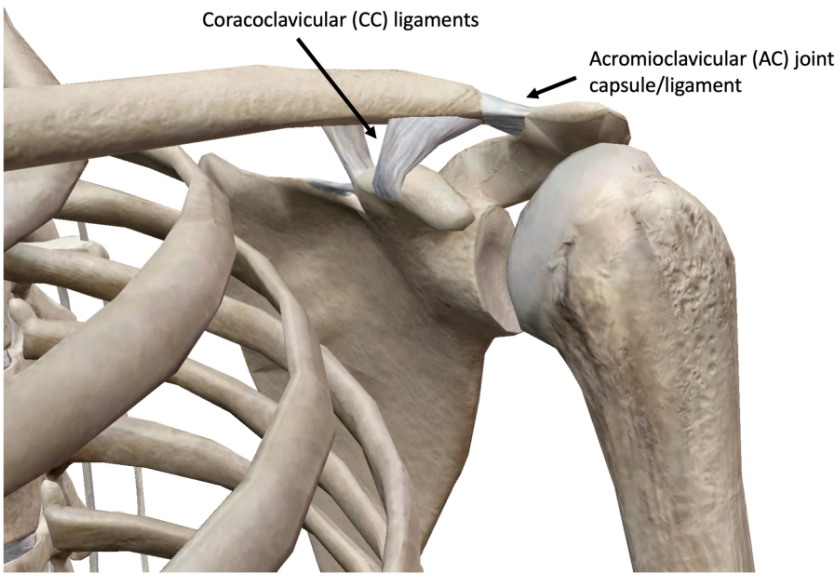
Signs and Symptoms

The injury tends to be graded depending on the severity of damage or stretch to the ligaments and capsule, with symptoms and recovery time generally being worse with higher grade injuries.

Symptoms include:

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- Pain on palpation of the collarbone.
- Pain radiating into the front of the neck or shoulder.
- Swelling at the joint.
- Displacement in the joint that may appear as a large lump on the top of the shoulder.
- Loss of power and range with overhead and cross body movements.



Management

The initial phase of treatment depends on how severe the injury is, but often begins with supporting the bone and ligaments in a brace or sling to help them heal. Your physio can show you some gentle mobilisation exercises to help prevent stiffness while waiting to load the joint.

The second phase of treatment will involve gradually restoring full shoulder range of motion as well as progressively strengthening muscles around the AC joint and shoulder blade. Activity modification during this phase to avoid certain aggravating activities is important.

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The final stage of rehab involves preparation for full return to sporting activities. Physio sessions will involve high load and high-level sports specific strength and control exercises to ensure adequate control and minimize risk of re-injury to the area of injury.

If you have sustained an AC joint injury, book an appointment with one of our expert physios to get a plan to get back to the activities or sport you love as quickly as possible.

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