A faint, light-colored anatomical illustration of a shoulder joint, showing the humeral head, scapula, and clavicle, positioned in the background behind the text.

# Acromioclavicular Joint Pain

Healthshare Information for Guided Patient Management

## Index

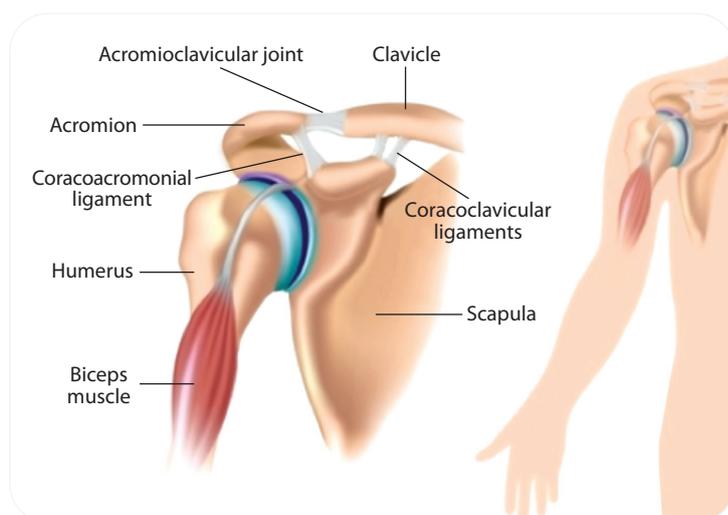
Introduction .....	2
What causes acromioclavicular joint pain?.....	2
The ACJ can become painful for different reasons .....	2
What are the signs and symptoms? .....	2
What should I do to improve the pain? .....	2
Is it likely to get worse?.....	3
What other treatments available? .....	3
Exercises for acromioclavicular joint pain (ACJ) .....	4
Contact us .....	4

## Introduction

Healthshare is committed to improving your health and wellbeing. This information leaflet is produced by health professionals who are expert in improving musculoskeletal conditions. The information is based on the latest available evidence from research in the field. If you are not sure of any of the given information, please contact our physiotherapy helpline for further information.

## What causes acromioclavicular joint pain?

The acromioclavicular joint (ACJ) is a small joint between your collar bone (clavicle) and the part of your shoulder blade (scapula) known as the acromion.



## The ACJ can become painful for different reasons:

- Trauma: sports injuries and a fall on the shoulder.
- Osteoarthritis: Mostly seen in adults over the age of 30.
- Repetitive strain that may be due to sudden increases in activity.
- Bone injuries of the clavicle.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

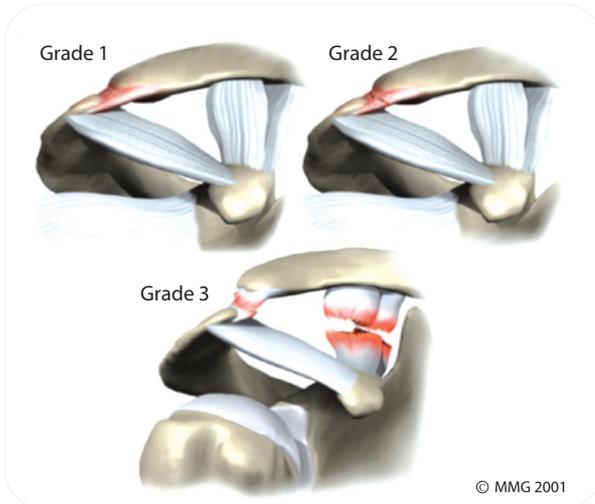
- Pain over the top of the shoulder.
- A small bump at the end of the collar bone.
- Pain with pressure on the top of the shoulder joint.
- Pain lying on the side of the shoulder.
- Increasing shoulder pain with overhead shoulder movements.
- Shoulder pain may be increased by lifting or carrying.
- Shoulder pain while taking your arm across your chest.

## What should I do to improve the pain?

1. Allow 2-4 weeks relative rest for the injured tissues to heal.
2. Reduce the activity which causes your pain.
3. Try simple pain killers such as Paracetamol or anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen.
4. Massage the top of the shoulder around the ACJ every 2 hours to increase the local blood supply and reduce pain
5. **Ice:** This is very helpful with ligament injuries from sports or a fall. Apply ice over the AC joint for a maximum of 15 minutes every 2 hours. Please avoid placing the ice directly on the skin. (Wrap it in a damp tea towel)
6. **Pain free exercise:** This will help to maintain and improve your muscle strength to prevent further problems.

### Is it likely to get worse?

- Most ligament sprains around the ACJ can be divided into Mild, Moderate and Severe.
- Mild to moderate ACJ ligament injuries should improve well over 2-3 months.
- Severe ligament injuries around the ACJ are rarely repairable and the pain associated with this generally improves over 6 months.
- You may have a bony bump at the end of the collar bone. However, there are no guaranteed non-invasive or invasive treatments to fix this.
- Osteoarthritis of the ACJ comes on slowly and is very commonly seen in people over the age of 30 who do not have pain.
- Remember you don't always get pain from ACJ osteoarthritis.



### What other treatments available?

- Your GP or physiotherapist may ask you to avoid certain activities and advise you on specific exercises.
- A steroid injection into the AC joint may help to reduce inflammation and pain
- Surgery is rarely considered for the ACJ.

## Exercises for ACJ



### Static inwards rotation

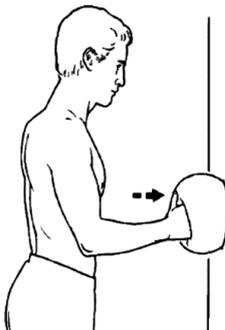
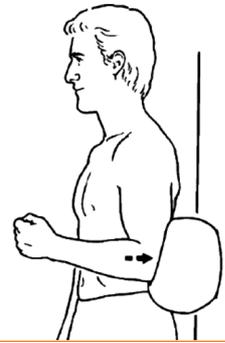
Stand with your arm close to your side, with a pillow placed between your side and your elbow and your elbow at a right angle. Push the palm of your hand against the other hand inwards.

Hold for 10 seconds x 10. Repeat 2 times a day.

### Static backward push

Press the back of your arm into a wall using light/moderate resistance.

Hold for 10 seconds x 10. Repeat 2 times a day.



### Static forward push

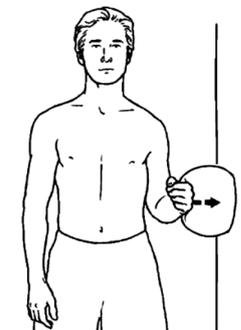
Using a wall to provide resistance, press your fist into the wall as shown, using light/moderate resistance.

Hold for 10 seconds x 10 reps. Repeat 2 times a day.

### Static outwards rotation

Stand with your arm close to your side, with a towel placed between the wall and your hand, and your elbow at a right angle. Push the back of your hand against a wall.

Hold for 10 seconds x 10 reps. Repeat 2 times a day.



### Saw movement

Supporting your body weight with your hand on a table, reach out in front of you. Pull your arm back pinching the shoulder blades together.

Repeat 10 times x 3 sets, 3 times a day.

### Anterior soft tissue stretch

Grasp your hands together behind your back, keeping your arms straight as you raise them. Be careful not to drop your head forward.

Hold the position for 10 seconds x 5. Repeat 3 times a day.

