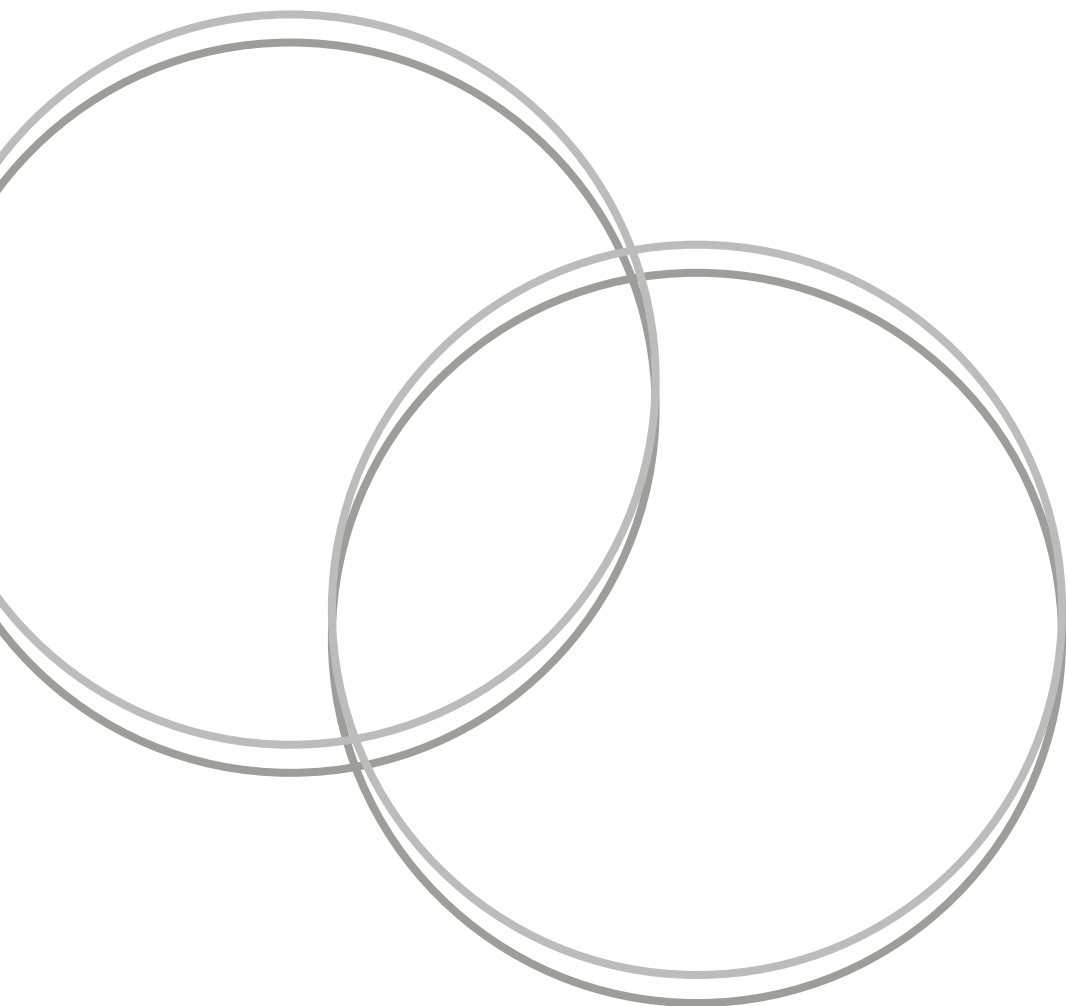




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Acromioclavicular Joint (ACJ) Injury

Information for patients



## **Acromioclavicular Joint (ACJ) Injury**

An acromioclavicular joint (ACJ) injury is a minor injury to the joint at the end of your collar bone.

An ACJ injury often occurs when you fall and land on your shoulder. It can also be caused by indirect trauma such as a fall onto an elbow. It is a common injury amongst rugby players and cyclists.

## **Management of your injury**

In the Emergency Department you may have been given a polysling or collar and cuff sling to wear to support your shoulder.

Wear your sling for comfort. Take it off to wash, dress and do your exercises. You don't have to wear your sling at night. You may find it more comfortable to sleep propped up on pillows.

Using a cold pack will help with your pain and swelling. You can use an ice pack or bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel. Put this on your shoulder for 15 minutes every few hours. Make sure the ice isn't in direct contact with your skin.

Try to rest your arm, especially in the first 24-72 hours.

## **Sleep**

When you have injured your shoulder, it can sometimes be difficult to find a comfortable sleeping position. You may find it more comfortable to sleep propped up with pillows. When sleeping on your back, try sleeping with a small pillow under the arm, so you keep it supported and off the bed. If you are a side sleeper, sleep on the non-injured side and hugging a pillow.

# Exercises

It is important to start gentle exercises straight away to prevent stiffness. You will find instructions for your exercises below. Do not lift your arm over shoulder height for the first 3 weeks. You should not do any heavy lifting for the first 6 weeks.

## Weeks 1-3

Start these exercises straight away. Try to do these exercises 4-5 times a day. Repeat each exercise 10 times.

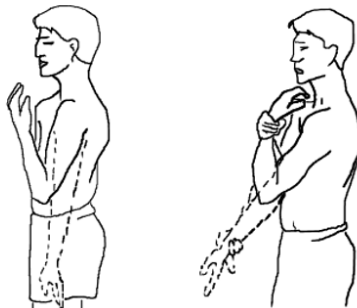
### Hand, Wrist and Elbow Exercises:

*We suggest that the following exercises are held for 5 seconds and repeated 10 times.*

#### 1. Elbow Flexion/Extension

When Standing:

- a) Bend and straighten your elbow fully.  
Stand with your arm fully straight beside you in a relaxed position, then gently bend the arm at the elbow so that the palm of the hand moves towards the shoulder.
- b) Apply some added gentle pressure with your other hand to help your arm to bend, and then help your arm to straighten.



## 2. Supination/Pronation

When sitting:

Rest your arm on a table or armrest of a chair.

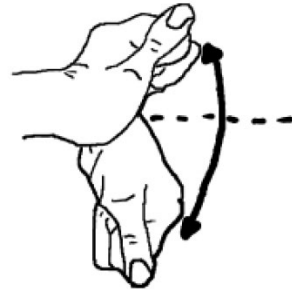
Hold your elbow into your side with your forearm in front of you in a comfortable position.

Turn the palm of your hand up then down, keeping your elbow still.



## 3. Wrist flexion and extension

Keeping your forearm still, move your wrist up and down.



## 4. Finger flexion and extension

Open and close your hand and fingers of your injured arm.

After a few days, hold a soft ball/ball of socks, squeeze the ball as hard as possible without pain.



## Posture Exercise

Bring your shoulders back and gently squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

## Pendular Exercise

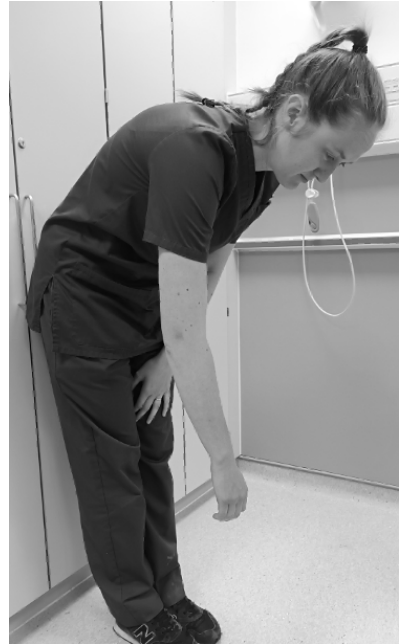
Stand next to a firm surface for example with your back against a wall. Support yourself with your un-injured arm and lean forwards gently by bending at the waist.

Let your injured arm relax and hang down towards the ground.

Gently swing your arm, making a small movement. Try to do this forward and backward, side to side and in small circles.

Aim to do this for 1-2 minutes in total. You do not need to push into pain.

Remember to keep your arm relaxed.



## Weeks 3-6

You can stop using your sling. You can now return to light activities.

Remember, you should not do any heavy lifting for 6 weeks

### Exercises:

Start these exercises 3 weeks after your injury. Try to do them 4-5 times a day. Repeat each exercise 10 times.

## Active Assisted Shoulder Flexion

Place your other hand under the elbow of your injured arm. Bend the elbow of your injured arm until your hand and fingers are near your chin. Continue to use your hand to support the elbow and gently lift your arm up in front of you, aim to get your elbow at 90 degrees to your shoulder.

Repeat this 10 times



**Start position**



**Finish position**

## Active Assisted External Rotation

Keep the elbow of your injured arm tucked into your side and with your elbow bent. Hold onto a stick/ umbrella/golfclub or similar. Use your unaffected arm to push the hand on your injured arm outwards using this stick. Remember to keep your elbow tucked in. Push until you feel a stretch.

If you do not have a stick you could hold your injured arm at the wrist and guide it outwards.



**Once you can do all the above exercises without the support of your non-injured arm then you can move onto the exercises below**

## Active Forward Flexion

Stand with your arms straight beside your body, palms inwards and with your thumb facing up, move your arm forwards and up whilst keeping your elbow straight, try to get your arm at 90 degrees to your body, once you have achieved this keep going until you can lift your arm fully above your head aiming for a smooth movement of 180 degrees.



# Active Abduction

Stand with your arm straight beside your body and with the palm of your hand facing forwards and thumb facing up and outwards.

Move your arm in a big arc out to the side. Try to get your arm at a 90 degree angle to your body, once you can do this comfortably continue to lift your arm up so that eventually your hand is above your head and you can complete a 180 degree arc.

**1**



**3**



**2**



## Active External Rotation

With your elbow by your side, rotate your forearm outwards, keeping your elbow bent at about 90 degrees.



Repeat these 3 exercises 10 times each, 4-5 times a day. Only go as far as you can naturally. This will increase over time and should not be forced.

## Pain Relief

Take regular painkillers, to help you move more easily and gently exercise your injured limb. Paracetamol is ideal. If paracetamol does not help, you may need a stronger painkiller, such as codeine. Codeine is only available on prescription; however, you can buy a combination of paracetamol with codeine over the counter of any pharmacy. Please speak to the pharmacist for extra advice and tell the pharmacist if you are taking other medications.

Please read and follow the dosage instructions on the packet carefully. If you require a stronger pain relief, please contact your own GP for a prescription.

## **Smoking Cessation**

Medical evidence suggests that smoking prolongs fracture healing time. In extreme cases it can stop healing altogether. It is important that you consider this information with relation to your recent injury. Stopping smoking during the healing phase of your fracture will help ensure optimal recovery from this injury.

## **How to contact us**

If you continue to have pain 8 weeks after your injury, despite taking regular painkillers and caring for your injury as advised, or if at any point you are worried your injury is not healing, please contact the New Patient Clinic for an appointment.

## **Useful telephone Numbers**

New Patient (Fracture Clinic) at:

John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm

Saturday and Sunday 9.00am to 11.00am

Tel: **01865 220 217**



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Emergency Department  
February 2026  
Review: February 2029  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

