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What is Acromioclavicular Joint Injury?

The acromioclavicular joint (commonly referred to as the AC joint) is located where the bone on the top of the shoulder (acromion, part of the shoulder blade) meets the collarbone (clavicle). These bones are connected together by ligaments. Acromioclavicular Joint Injury is a condition in which the ligaments are torn when the shoulder is struck directly, such as in collision sports, car accidents, when a person falls from a bicycle, or in skiing injuries. Injury to the acromioclavicular joint may range from mild damage to a complete rupture of the ligaments (see images above).

What are the symptoms?

- Pain and swelling at the tip of the shoulder which varies in intensity, depending on the type (severity) of the injury.
- Pain that is aggravated when elevating the arm above the head.
- Pain that is aggravated when sleeping on the involved side.

How is it treated?

Depending on the type (severity) of the injury, treatment may include the application of ice, rest, use of an arm sling, massage, rehabilitation exercises, and the use of therapeutic modalities such as laser and ultrasound phonophoresis. In some patients, medication may be required to manage pain and inflammation. In severe cases, surgery may be warranted.

What can I do?

- Apply ice over the affected region for about 10 minutes, several times a day for pain control. Ice can be applied as often as every hour.
- Avoid or minimize any aggravating activities (e.g., overhead reaching, as well as lifting and carrying heavy objects).
- If any exercises or stretches are prescribed, perform them daily within your pain tolerance. Stop the exercises if they worsen your symptoms and inform your health practitioner so that your exercise plan can be modified.

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