

ACJ injuries

The acromio-clavicular joint, or ACJ, is located on the top of your shoulder. Injuries to this joint can lead to restricted and painful movement. If left untreated, postural changes and abnormal movement habits can occur, increasing the likelihood of secondary problems.

The ACJ is formed by the distal end of your collar bone, or clavicle, and the acromion process; a bony protrusion at the top of your shoulder blade, or scapula.

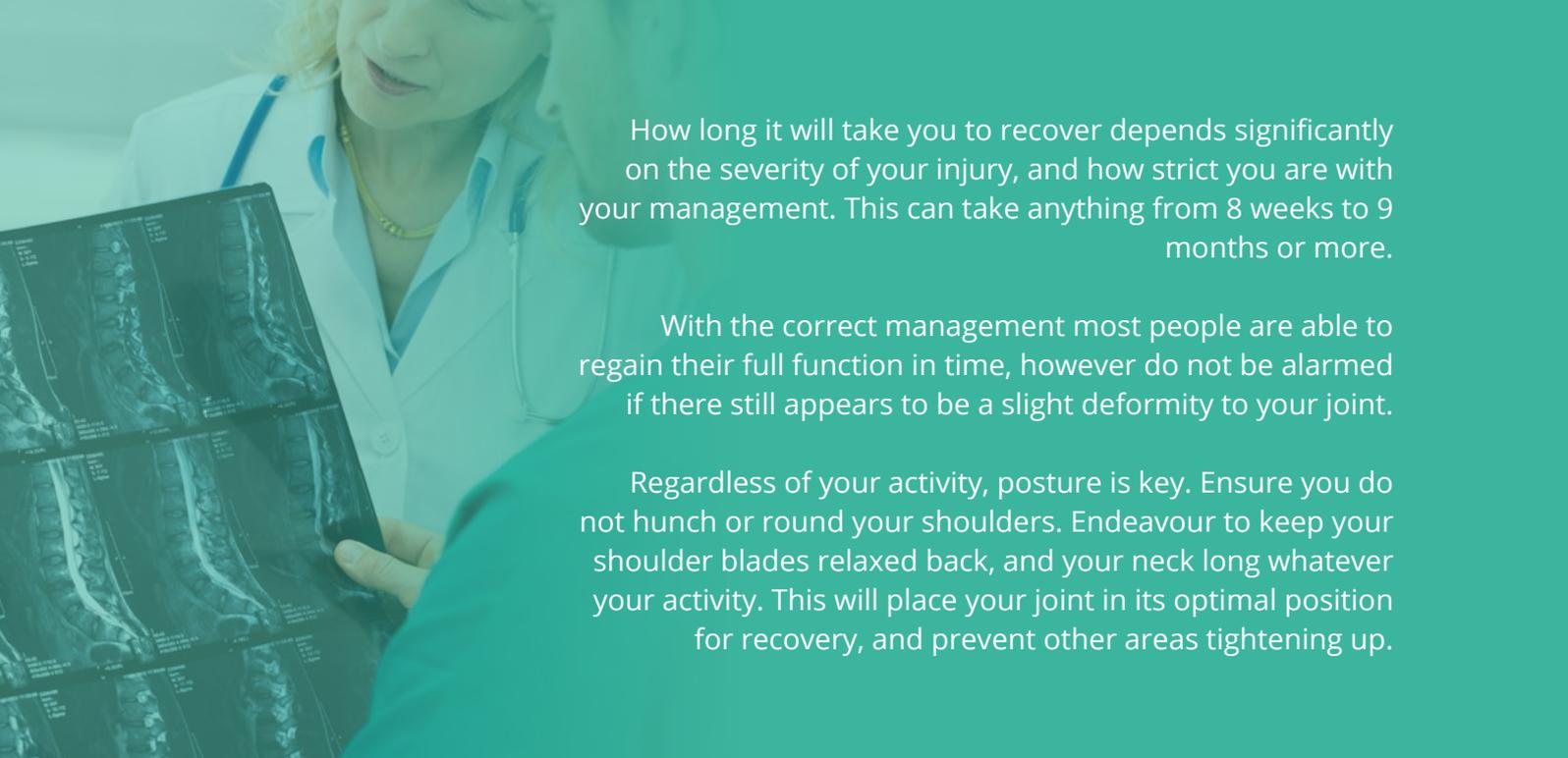
It provides stability to your shoulder blade, and allows efficient transmission of forces between your body and your shoulder. The ACJ is surrounded by ligaments which help to keep it in position.



Injuries to the ACJ

Injuries to the ACJ can often be seen in the athletic population, as they tend to be associated with a sudden trauma such as falling off a bike or an awkward sports tackle. However any other high force incident, such as that seen in a road traffic accident can incur an injury to the ACJ.

As the joint sits very superficially under the skin, bruising and swelling are normally quite visible. There may be a change in how your joint looks, depending on the severity of your injury.



How long it will take you to recover depends significantly on the severity of your injury, and how strict you are with your management. This can take anything from 8 weeks to 9 months or more.

With the correct management most people are able to regain their full function in time, however do not be alarmed if there still appears to be a slight deformity to your joint.

Regardless of your activity, posture is key. Ensure you do not hunch or round your shoulders. Endeavour to keep your shoulder blades relaxed back, and your neck long whatever your activity. This will place your joint in its optimal position for recovery, and prevent other areas tightening up.

Medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, can help with reducing pain and easing movement in the first few days.

Use a hot water bottle on the muscles by your neck. This area can often tighten due to pain, so using heat will help to alleviate this tension.

Avoid any activities that irritate your pain in the early days, such as lifting your arm above head height. This will only inhibit your recovery. It might be necessary to wear a sling when you are out and about.

Stretching can help to prevent stiffness in your shoulder generally without running too much risk of irritating your symptoms. These are particularly useful in the early days of your injury. Once your initial pain and inflammation has begun to settle, strengthening exercises will commence, focussing on your postural muscles, as well as the muscles that stabilise your shoulder.

Rehabilitation

In time, your rehabilitation will become more goal orientated, focussing on helping you to achieve the level of activity you were able to do prior to your injury. Your clinician will guide you through your exercises at a rate appropriate to your recovery.

