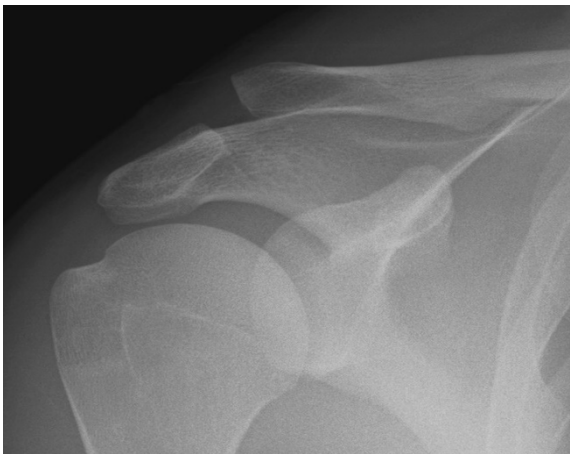
Acromio clavicular joint (ACJ) injuries: discharge advice

You have injured the ligaments holding the clavicle (collar bone) to the shoulder bone. This leaflet explains how to best care for your clavicle and shoulder while it heals.



- You have injured the ligaments holding the clavicle (collar bone) to the shoulder bone.
- This may result in you having a swelling or bump or a significant protuberance at the end of your collar bone if the ACJ was dislocated.
- The pain and tenderness you are experiencing in this area will gradually settle over a period of several weeks.
- During this time, you may find lifting your shoulder and reaching to the back of your head uncomfortable but it is perfectly safe to try.
- You may be provided with a sling for support. This is only to help with the pain and will not have **any** effect on the speed of recovery or position of the bones.
- You may use the shoulder as much as pain allows and should gradually discard the support over 1-3 weeks as the pain settles. Although it can twinge for up to 3 months.
- See overleaf for basic shoulder exercises.
- Most injuries heal without any problems – however, it may take several months for your symptoms to settle completely and any visible bump may remain.
- Occasionally, the injury may fail to settle even after several months.
- If you are still experiencing significant symptoms such as pain, sense of instability, reduced strength or loss of confidence in the shoulder after several months then please phone the Fracture Clinic helpline as listed below for further advice.

If you have any worries or concerns following discharge from hospital, please contact: **Fracture Clinic on 0118 322 6567 (12-5pm, Monday to Friday) or mobile: 07554 330 369.**

Shoulder injury exercises

To overcome stiffness in your shoulder, do the exercises below.

Remember:

- Remove sling before exercising. **Staff to delete as appropriate.*
- Complete five of each exercise or as many as is comfortable but **do not continue if it is too painful!**
- As the exercises become easier, build up to completing three times a day.

Postural awareness

Standing or sitting:
Pull the shoulder blades gently back and down, with the chest bone (sternum) naturally coming forwards, as if taking a deep breath in.



Elbow exercises

Standing:
Bend and straighten the elbow fully, using assistance of the good arm if needed.

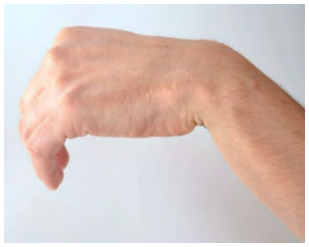


Standing or sitting:
With a bent elbow, turn the forearm over in a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction (palm up, then palm down).



Wrist and hand exercises

Bend your wrist in a forwards and then a backwards movement, and then side to side.
Circle the wrist in a clockwise and then an anticlockwise direction.
Squeeze and make a fist. You can use a small ball if you have one.





Begin assisted shoulder movement

Sitting or standing:
Use the good arm to support the operated arm and gently lift the operated arm up away from the body, **only to shoulder height**.

Sitting at a table:
Put a cloth or small ball underneath the operated arm (hand).
Gently slide the operated arm away from the body, using the table to take the full weight of the arm.
DO NOT lean your body forward into the table.






From 2 weeks to 6 weeks

You can now remove the sling and begin the following exercises as pain allows, but it is very important that you **do not lift the arm above shoulder height**.

Continue table slides (as previous exercise). **DO NOT** lean your body forward into the table.	
Lying on your back: Lift the operated arm up to a vertical position, using the other hand to assist if needed.	 
Standing or sitting: Lift the operated arm forward and up in front of you, **to shoulder height** unassisted.	

Standing or sitting: Tucking your bent elbow into your side, turn your arm away from your body unassisted.	
Standing: Lift the arm unassisted away from the body and out to the side no further than shoulder height.	

Six weeks after the injury, or as you feel able, you can progress to moving the arm above shoulder height.

Contacting us

Physiotherapy Outpatient Department Physiotherapy East: 0118 322 7811
For questions or concerns, please contact: rbft.physiotherapy@nhs.net

Images courtesy of http://simpleset.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Physiotherapy (Orthopaedic Shoulder Team), November 2026.
Next review due: November 2028.