Acromio-Clavicular Joint Stabilisation

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Acromio-Clavicular Joint Stabilisation

The acromioclavicular joint (AC joint) sits at the highest point of the shoulder. It is the junction between the shoulder blade (acromion) and collar bone (clavicle). It is supported and stabilised by the capsule of the joint and ligaments.

If you have an accident or injury that damages your AC joint, this may be referred to as a dislocation, separation, subluxation or disruption.
What is an Acromio-Clavicular Stabilisation?

Stabilisation surgery may be done following an acute injury to the AC joint or following a failed attempt to conservatively manage your injury and/or symptoms. The aim of the surgery is to restore stability to your joint, reduce your pain and improve upper limb function.

After the operation

Your arm is supported in a sling straight after your operation to protect the repair. It is essential that you wear the sling day and night for the first 3 weeks (your Physiotherapist will advise you). You can remove the sling to carry out your exercises and for washing and dressing only.

Pain

It is normal to feel some pain following your operation. You will be given some painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory medication to take in the days following the operation.

Using ice on your shoulder can be helpful in reducing pain. Wrap a bag of crushed ice, or frozen peas in a damp towel.

Protect your dressings from getting wet with a layer of cling film, or a plastic bag, before applying the ice pack for 10-15 minutes at a time.

Posture can make a big difference to your pain after surgery. Avoid ‘hitching’ your shoulder or holding it in an elevated position. Also try to avoid slumping or standing/sitting with round shoulders as this puts more stress onto your shoulder.
Getting back to normal
It is normal to feel more tired than usual for a few days after having an operation. Sleeping can be uncomfortable and it is important to try not to lie on your operated shoulder. You should wear your sling in bed for the first 3 weeks (your Physiotherapist will advise you). Using pillows to support your operated arm and maintain your posture when sleeping will help with the discomfort.

Washing and dressing
Dressings and bandages that are applied in theatre need to stay dry. Remove your sling when bathing or showering, but keep your arm close to your body. Ensure that the area is dry before dressing to prevent irritation in the armpit. It is easier to wear looser fitting clothes and dress by putting your operated arm into position in the top first.

Wound care
Your wound also needs to stay clean and dry. If you have removable stitches they will be removed after 10-14 days at an out-patient clinic appointment, or by your GP. If dissolvable stitches are used, they will not need to be removed.

Rehabilitation
Rehabilitation is important if you are to get the most out of your shoulder after the operation. You should be given information about your first physiotherapy appointment before you leave hospital. The amount of physiotherapy you will need will depend on your individual progress and the level of activity you wish to return to.
Returning to work

The amount of time you have off work depends on your job. If you have a manual job, or one that involves lifting or overhead activities, you may not be able to do this for 8-12 weeks. Please discuss this with your Consultant or Physiotherapist.

Driving

When you are comfortable and in control of your shoulder and arm you may return to driving. You must be able to comfortably control your vehicle and perform emergency manoeuvres. This should not be attempted until approximately 6-8 weeks. You should discuss this further with your Consultant or Physiotherapist.

Sports and activities

The timescale for which you can go back to any previous sport or activity will depend on your movement and strength and the particular activity you have in mind. Please discuss returning to any activity or sport with your Consultant or Physiotherapist.
Post-operative exercises

With all of your exercises you should aim to repeat 10 repetitions, 3 times a day unless otherwise advised by your Physiotherapist.

1. Active hand and wrist exercises with forearm supported

- Use your non-operated hand to support the forearm on your operated side. Move your wrist up and down and side to side as far as you are comfortable
- With the same support, make a fist and then stretch your fingers as far as you can
- Slowly turn your forearm over so your palm faces up and then down

2. Passive elbow exercises

- Sit with good posture
- Use your non-operated hand to grip the forearm on your operated side
- Use the non-operated arm to slowly bend your elbow as far as you are comfortable and then straighten it as far as you are comfortable
3. External rotation with a stick

- Lying on your back with a folded towel under the operated arm with the elbow bent to 90 degrees with a stick held in your hands (as per photo)
- Keeping the affected elbow on the towel close to your body, rotate the arm away from your body using the stick to start and help the movement. Go as far as you can but DO NOT FORCE or produce a STRETCH. Hold the end position for a few seconds and return to the starting position.

4. Shoulder Flexion with a stick

- Lying on your back holding a stick in both hands. Your hands should be touching and palm down with the stick resting on your body
- Keeping your arms straight, raise the stick up allowing the non-operative arm to provide most of the effort needed. The operative arm should be as relaxed as possible throughout the exercise
- Go as far as you can but DO NOT FORCE THE EXERCISE or PRODUCE A STRETCH and return

Continue to wear your sling until your clinic review at approximately 3 weeks post surgery.

Avoid lifting your operated arm without the assistance of your non-operated arm for 3 weeks.
Contact details
If you have any questions regarding your operation or treatment, please do not hesitate to call us.

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The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm