

# Argus Orthopaedic Zone

## What Is Shoulder Separation?

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### *Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

Shoulder separation is completely different from shoulder dislocation. Most of my patients get the two confused. If I can, I will try to demystify the two conditions.

#### **Mechanism**

There is a sharp blow to the tip of the shoulder when you fall on your shoulder (not the elbow or hand). It happens sometimes when a quarterback is tackled in the backfield (sacked).

The collar bone separates or comes loose from its ligament attachment to the scapula. Ligaments tear, the clavicle pops up under the skin and you now have a separated shoulder. Ouch! It really hurts and looks awful.

#### **The A-C Joint**

The injury is to the so called A-C joint. Not to be confused with ACL (that is in the knee!).

Not to be confused with dislocation - that is the ball coming out of the socket. Shoulder separation is the collar bone and shoulder blade coming apart on the very top of the shoulder.

#### **Mild or Severe**

A shoulder separates because there is damage to ligaments holding the bones together. How severe the separation is depends on how badly the ligaments are torn.

#### **Signs and Symptoms**

The symptoms can vary a lot.

- Pain on top of the shoulder
- May be able to see a bump. That is the clavicle sticking up.
- Lifting the arm is very hard to do.
- Shoulder feels best with the arm supported.

## **When To Call Me**

- If pain persists even though you do not see a bump
- If you see a bump
- Shoulder looks deformed
- Can't use the arm

## **Making the Diagnosis**

If on exam I suspect a shoulder separation, I will x-ray the shoulder while the patient holds a light weight. An x-ray of the uninjured shoulder might be taken as comparison. When the shoulder is separated the collar bone pops up and is higher than on the uninjured side.

## **How I Treat It**

- If the separation is mild a sling will be worn for a few days until the pain goes away.
- Ice reduces swelling and pain.
- Advil or similar is usually enough for pain.
- As swelling decreases the collar bone may settle back into place.
- Exercise will be needed to restore motion and strength.
- It may take a month to return to sports.

## **Major (Severe) Separation**

If there is major ligament damage, surgery is usually required to repair the shoulder. There are several ways this can be done. A special sling will be needed for at least a month followed by several weeks of physical therapy.

## **Argus Orthopaedic Zone and Office Website**

Please remember you can access all the Orthopaedic information you need on the office website [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). In addition every article I have written for you in the Argus Orthopaedic Zone has been archived and can be located on the website. Check it out.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush