

Broken collarbone

Emergency Department Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a broken collarbone. This is known medically as a fractured clavicle. It includes information about what causes a broken collarbone, how it is treated and what to do when you get home.

What causes a broken collarbone?

It is a common injury that usually happens after a fall or a blow to the shoulder. The two collarbones, or clavicles, are long slender bones that run from the breastbone to each of the shoulders. You should be able to feel it each side at the top of your chest, just below your neck.

How is it Treated?

Most broken collarbones are left to heal naturally, using a simple triangular sling to support the arm and hold the bones together in their normal position.

The sling is usually fitted after you have had an X-ray to confirm the collarbone is broken. We will give you painkillers to relieve the pain, if required.

Surgery, using a general anaesthetic, is only needed if the injury is severe; for example, where the bone has broken through the skin. If you need surgery, you will be referred to the orthopaedic doctor who will discuss this with you.

What should I do at home?

Adults

- Take painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen to relieve the pain if you can take it (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose).
- Take your sling off at night.
- Take your sling off when resting, for example, when sitting watching television. Place a firm pillow under your arm. This will continue to take the weight of the arm off your injured collarbone / shoulder and make you more comfortable.
- Gently exercise your neck, elbow, wrist, and hand as pain allows. This is to prevent these areas from becoming stiff and painful.
- Avoid lying flat. This will make the pain worse in your collarbone / shoulder.
- Avoid contact sports and swimming for at least 12 weeks after the injury.

Children

- Give your child painkilling medicine, such as Calpol, if they can take it (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose).
- Never leave young children unsupervised when wearing a sling due to the risk of a strangulation injury.
- Remove your child's sling (at all ages) when they go to bed.
- Take your child's sling off when they are resting, for example, when they are sitting watching television. Place a firm pillow under your child's arm. This will continue to take the weight of the arm off your child's injured collarbone / shoulder and make them more comfortable.

- If your child is restless or in pain during the night, try to sit them more upright. Lying flat increases their pain. Try putting a pillow under the mattress in younger children.
- Encourage your child to gently exercise their neck, elbow, wrist and hand as pain allows. This is to prevent these areas from becoming stiff and painful.
- Do not let your child do any rough games or contact sports, including swimming for at least 12 weeks after the injury.

Follow-up care

A formal review appointment by the orthopaedic specialist is needed. This will usually be a virtual fracture clinic (VFC) appointment.

The VFC appointment will need to be made by you at the Emergency Department reception before you leave. You will need to confirm your contact details, and you will then be given a date and a rough time (AM or PM) when the orthopaedic specialist will telephone you. This will be provided on a VFC appointment card.

The VFC appointment card contains contact information (an email address and telephone message service information) should you have any concerns or questions before or after this appointment. You will be able to contact your specialist by using this contact information. Please keep your card for future reference.

Any different or specific follow-up arrangements required will be fully discussed and explained by your Emergency Department clinician.

Will I make a full recovery?

In adults, it usually takes about six to eight weeks for a broken collarbone to heal, although it may take longer. In children, it usually takes about three to six weeks for it to heal.

While the fracture heals, a lump may develop along your collarbone where new bone has grown. This is normal, and often improves over the following months.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-collarbone/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to one of our nurses. If you need help when you return home, please contact your GP.

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/accident-emergency/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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