



Broken collarbone

Diagnosis

During the physical exam, your doctor will inspect the affected area for tenderness, swelling, deformity or an open wound. X-rays determine the extent of a broken collarbone, pinpoint its location and determine if there's injury to the joints. Your doctor might also recommend a CT scan to get more-detailed images.

Treatment

Restricting the movement of any broken bone is critical to healing. To immobilize a broken collarbone, you'll likely need to wear an arm sling.

How long immobilization is needed depends on the severity of the injury. Bone union usually takes three to six weeks for children and six to 12 weeks for adults. A newborn's collarbone that breaks during delivery typically heals with only pain control and careful handling of the baby.

Medications

To reduce pain and inflammation, your doctor might recommend an over-the-counter pain reliever. If you have severe pain, you might need a prescription medication that contains a narcotic for a few days.

Therapy

Rehabilitation begins soon after initial treatment. In most cases, it's important to begin some motion to minimize stiffness in your shoulder while you're still wearing your sling. After your sling is removed, your doctor might recommend additional rehabilitation exercises or physical therapy to restore muscle strength, joint motion and flexibility.

Surgery

Surgery might be required if the fractured collarbone has broken through your skin, is severely displaced or is in several pieces. Broken collarbone surgery usually includes placing fixation devices — plates, screws or rods — to maintain proper position of your bone during healing. Surgical complications, though rare, can include infection and lack of bone healing.

Lifestyle and home remedies

Applying ice to the affected area for 20 to 30 minutes every few hours during the first two to three days after a collarbone break can help control pain and swelling.

Preparing for your appointment

Depending on the severity of the break, your family doctor or the emergency room physician may recommend that you or your child see an orthopedic surgeon.

What you can do

It might be helpful to write a list that includes:

- Detailed descriptions of your symptoms and the event that caused the injury
- Information about past medical problems
- All your medications and dietary supplements
- Questions you want to ask the doctor

What to expect from your doctor

Your doctor will likely ask some of the following questions:

- How did the injury occur?
- Have you ever had a broken bone?
- Have you been diagnosed with weakened bones?

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