

Sternoclavicular Joint Separation

Diagnosis Explanation:

A **sternoclavicular (SC) joint separation** occurs when the **ligaments connecting the clavicle (collarbone) to the sternum (breastbone) are stretched or torn**, causing **instability and pain at the base of the neck or upper chest**. This injury is typically caused by **direct trauma, falls, or impact to the shoulder**.

Types of SC Joint Separations:

- **Grade 1 (Mild Sprain):** Ligaments are stretched but intact; mild pain and swelling.
- **Grade 2 (Moderate Sprain):** Partial ligament tear; noticeable pain, swelling, and joint instability.
- **Grade 3 (Severe Dislocation):** Complete ligament tear; the clavicle shifts forward (anterior) or backward (posterior, which is more dangerous due to potential damage to major blood vessels and organs).

Symptoms:

- **Pain, swelling, and tenderness** near the collarbone-sternum connection.
- **Clicking or popping sensation** with movement.
- **Difficulty moving the shoulder or arm**, especially across the chest.
- **Visible deformity** if the joint is dislocated.
- **Shortness of breath or difficulty swallowing (if posterior dislocation is present).**

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job requires standing or walking:** Avoid **lifting, pushing, or pulling** with the affected arm.
- **If your job involves lifting:** Avoid **carrying heavy loads**, especially across the body. Use **both hands when possible**.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Keep the **shoulder supported**, avoid **leaning on the affected side**, and take **breaks every 30 minutes**.
- **Avoid:** Overhead reaching, repetitive shoulder use, and activities that put pressure on the SC joint.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you play sports:** Avoid **contact sports, throwing, and weight-bearing arm activities** until cleared for return.
- **If you do weightlifting:** Avoid **bench presses, overhead presses, dips, and pull-ups**; instead, focus on **controlled, pain-free movements**.
- **If you do yoga or Pilates:** Modify poses to **avoid deep shoulder stretches**,

deep breathing pain, or arm weight-bearing.

- **Avoid:** Any activity that puts strain on the collarbone and chest, including push-ups, rowing, or heavy lifting.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for ligament and joint repair.
- **Vitamin C** - 500mg daily to support collagen synthesis.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint lubrication and ligament health.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** - 500-1000mg daily for natural pain relief.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to support ligament and muscle healing.
- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (berries, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce swelling.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain joint lubrication.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to support joint function.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for SC Joint Separation)

Early Phase (0-2 Weeks, Reducing Pain & Protecting the Joint):

- **Immobilization** - Wear a **sling for 2-4 weeks**, as directed by your doctor.
- **Pendulum Exercises** - Lean forward, let the arm hang, gently swing in small circles, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Scapular Squeezes** - Pinch shoulder blades together, hold **5 seconds**, repeat **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Neck & Chest Stretch** - Gently tilt the head away from the injured side, hold **20 seconds, 3x/day**.

Strengthening Phase (2-6 Weeks, Improving Stability & Mobility):

- **Wall Walks (Forward and Lateral)** - Use fingers to "walk" the arm up the wall, **hold 5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **External Rotation with Resistance Band** - Keep elbow at **90 degrees**, rotate forearm outward, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Internal Rotation with Resistance Band** - Keep elbow at **90 degrees**, rotate forearm inward, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (6+ Weeks, Preventing Recurrence & Maintaining Mobility):

- **Lateral Arm Raises (Light Resistance)** - Raise arms to shoulder height, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Scapular Stability Exercises (Resistance Band Rows)** - Pull resistance band toward chest, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Modified Push-Ups (Wall or Knees, If Pain-Free)** - Maintain control, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Helpful Books:

1. *The Shoulder Pain Solution: Simple Exercises to Prevent and Recover from Injury* - John M. Kirsch, MD.
2. *Overcoming Shoulder Pain: A Guide to Rehabilitation and Recovery* - Peter T. J. Barrett.

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.