

# AC Joint Separation



AC joint separation is a common injury of the shoulder. Falling onto the shoulder or “jamming” the shoulder is the most common mechanism.

The true injury is to the coracoclavicular ligament which anchors the entire upper extremity to the rest of the torso. It is **IMPERATIVE** to do a non-weighted and weighted (10-15 lbs) X-ray of the AC joint to determine the extent of injury. Normally, the inferior aspect of the joint space is in perfect alignment. In a Type I injury there is no change in alignment on both views and the healing time is 1 week to 1 month. In a Type II injury the clavicle moves superiorly on the weighted view but is still adjacent to the acromion (as seen below). Type II injuries will take 1 month to 1 year to heal. Type III injury will cause the clavicle to migrate superiorly on the weighted view to a point that it will no longer be adjacent to the acromion. Type III injury takes up to 1 year to reach maximum improvement and often has residuals. Remember, all three types look normal without weight due to guarding and spasm.