

Separated shoulder

Overview

A separated shoulder is an injury to the ligaments that hold your collarbone (clavicle) to your shoulder blade. In a mild separated shoulder, the ligaments might just be stretched. In severe injuries, ligaments might be torn.

In most people, a separated shoulder doesn't usually require surgery. Instead, conservative treatment — such as rest, ice and pain relievers — is often enough to relieve the pain. Most people regain full shoulder function within a few weeks after having a separated shoulder.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of a separated shoulder might include:

- Shoulder pain
- Shoulder or arm weakness
- Shoulder bruising or swelling
- Limited shoulder movement
- A bump and swelling at the top of your shoulder

When to see a doctor

Contact your doctor if you have persistent tenderness or pain near the end of your collarbone.

Causes

The most common cause of a separated shoulder is a blow to the point of your shoulder or a fall directly on your shoulder. The injury may stretch or tear the ligaments that hold your collarbone to your shoulder blade.

Risk factors

Participating in contact sports, such as football and hockey, or in sports that can involve falls — such as downhill skiing, gymnastics and volleyball — might put you at higher risk of a separated shoulder.

Complications

Most people fully recover from a separated shoulder with conservative treatment. Continued shoulder pain is possible, however, if:

- You have a severe separation that involves significant displacement or fracture of the collarbone
- You develop arthritis in your shoulder
- Other structures around your shoulder, such as the rotator cuff, are damaged

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