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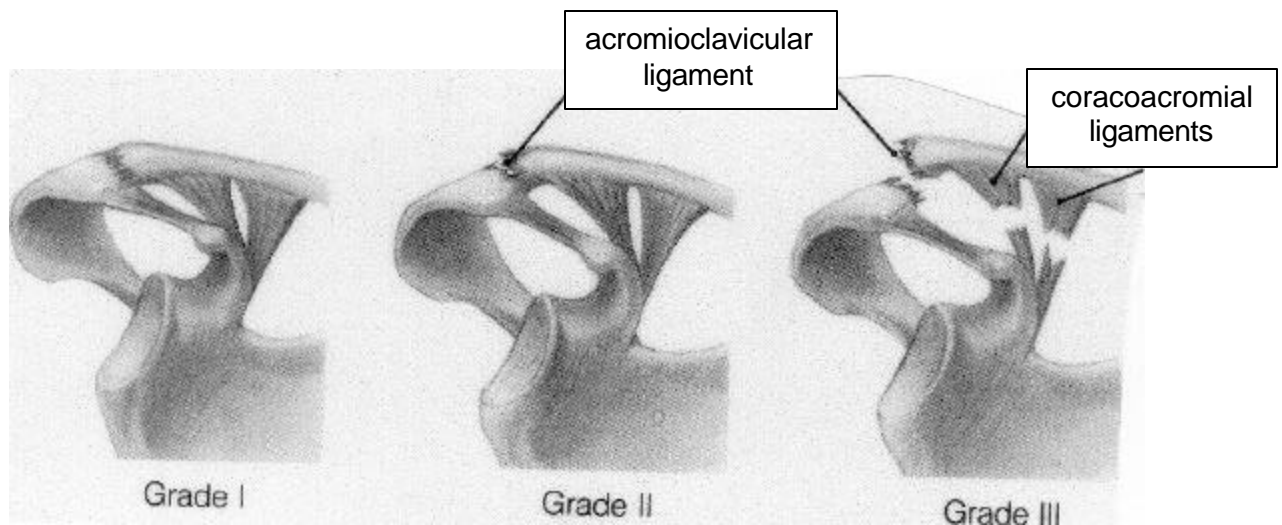
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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

## What is a Separated Shoulder?

One of the more common shoulder injuries I see in Chiropractic practice is the separation of the acromioclavicular joint. This joint is located at the end of your collarbone (clavicle) where it attaches to the shoulder blade (acromian process of the scapula). It is held in place by two ligaments: the acromioclavicular and the coracoacromial ligaments. In my practice, this injury often occurs in people who rodeo and play hockey. During a rodeo, the participants are often thrown from their mount and land on the outside tip of the shoulder or with their hands outstretched. In hockey, a player can be on the receiving end of a vicious body check and his or her shoulder hits the boards. Either of these scenarios puts immense pressure on the acromioclavicular joint, causing damage to the ligaments.



The variable levels of damage to the acromioclavicular joint are usually broken into three grades. A grade one is when there is a partial tear of only the acromioclavicular ligament and the joint remains intact. A grade two is when there is a full tear of the acromioclavicular ligament and a partial tear of the coracoacromial ligament. As well, when you look at the shoulder in the mirror, you will see a bump or

“step defect” over the joint. This is because the end of the collarbone (clavicle) is riding up onto the acromian process. A grade three is when both the acromioclavicular and coracoacromial ligaments are fully torn. The bump or “step defect” is now more prominent, as the end of the collar bone (clavicle) is now freely floating.

Making a diagnosis of a grade three is fairly easy, but not always so for a grade one or two. When a grade two or three sprain is x-rayed, you can see how the end of the collar bone is sliding up over the acromian process. In all grades, the joint will be painful to touch and if you ask the person where it hurts, they will often point right to it. There may be bruising and swelling around the joint as well. Simply listening to the person describe how they injured it usually gives me the diagnosis right away.

As far as treatment goes, the first thing you should do is put the shoulder in a sling for a few days until you can move it a little without making it sore. During this time, you should be applying ice to it a few times per day –usually 20 minutes on and thirty minutes off. Over the next two to three weeks, you should not be playing any contact sports or participating in any activities that may jar the shoulder. As the ligaments heal, you should slowly increase the use of your shoulder. Once you can move the shoulder in all ranges of motion without pain, you can return to your regular activities. In the case of a grade three sprain, the ligaments are torn right off and they will likely never heal or reattach on their own. There is much debate regarding the treatment of this severe of a sprain. The joint could be pinned or screwed together and the ligaments reattached surgically. However, this slightly limits the overall movement in the shoulder. As well, the acromioclavicular joint often becomes very arthritic and may require further surgery at a later date. Particularly in grade one or two sprains, conservative therapy is your best bet. Your Chiropractor is well trained in this area and can offer treatment or even advice. To find out more about the education of a Chiropractor, check out our website at [www.merrittchiro.com](http://www.merrittchiro.com)