

Fractured clavicle (broken collarbone)

A crack or a break in a bone is called a fracture.

The clavicle or "collar bone" connects the scapula (shoulder-blade) to your sternum (breastbone). It holds the shoulder upward and backward.

A broken clavicle is the most common fracture found in children. A break in the clavicle normally takes about 6 weeks to heal in an adult and 4 weeks in a child. Surgery is rarely needed for children.

Causes

At birth, the clavicle may fracture while the baby is passing through the birth canal. The fracture is often not diagnosed until a hard lump (callus) is noticed on the bone. This lump is caused by healing. It needs no treatment and the lump will disappear as the baby grows.

Accidents such as falls against the shoulder or on an outstretched hand are the most common causes of fractures of the clavicle. Sometimes, being hit on the shoulder can cause the clavicle to break.

Signs of a fracture of the clavicle

- Pain
- Swelling
- Tenderness
- Deformity or "bump" at the site of the fracture
- Bruising caused by bleeding around the break

People with a broken clavicle cannot lift their arm without extreme pain.

Treatment

Children with a broken clavicle are usually given a simple sling which is worn under clothing so that it keeps their clavicle still (immobilised) until it heals. This takes about 3 to 4 weeks. For an adult, usually a simple arm sling needs to be worn for about 6 weeks.

Your child will need pain relief. To keep the pain under control for the first few days after the injury, regular paracetamol (eg. Panadol) and ibuprofen (eg Nurofen) is recommended. For severe pain use oxycodone (this may only be needed at night for the first few days). You will need a doctor's prescription for this. After the first few days, use simple paracetamol (eg Panadol) or ibuprofen (eg Nurofen) as needed.

Healing is considered complete when there is no movement or pain at the fracture site.

Children with a broken clavicle will usually be able to exercise their shoulder after three weeks of immobilisation.

There will be a lump where the fracture was but this will decrease in size with time.

Most children do not need to be seen again at the hospital – see your local doctor.

For more information

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<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au>

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call Translating Centre and ask them to call Department of Health. This service you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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