

## Rehabilitation Guidelines | AC Joint Debridement

### What to expect during your recovery

Rehabilitation after AC joint debridement is typically a **quick and progressive process**. The procedure involves only removal of inflamed tissue and bone from the acromioclavicular (AC) joint. There are no internal sutures or other types of repair work. Your rehabilitation focuses on restoring movement early, followed by strengthening and a gradual return to normal activities.

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### General guidelines

- A sling may be used for comfort only and is usually discontinued within the first few days
- Early movement is encouraged to prevent stiffness
- Rehabilitation progresses quickly compared to more complex shoulder procedures
- Pain should guide activity levels

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### Weeks 0-2: Early recovery and movement

During the first 1–2 weeks, the focus is on:

- Reducing pain and swelling - ice the area
- Beginning **early movement** exercises
- Maintaining mobility of the elbow, wrist and hand

Exercises:

- Pendulum exercises (small circular movements)
- Range of motion to the level tolerated, as directed by the hospital physiotherapist
- Active-assisted movements:
  - Forward flexion
  - Internal rotation
  - External rotation
- Do exercises 3x/day at least

**Important:**

- Driving is permitted
- Light use of the arm for daily activities
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Avoid repetitive overhead activity in the early phase

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### Weeks 2-4: Restoring full movement

During this stage:

- The sling is no longer required
- Push range of motion to maximum extent
  - Continue daily movement exercises
  - Commence physio appointments
  - Light isometrics
- Normal daily activities can be increased

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### Weeks 4-12: Strengthening and return to function

Rehabilitation goals in this phase:

- Strengthening of all muscle groups
  - Physiotherapist directed exercise program
  - Resistance bands progressing to light weights
- Improving control and coordination
- Gradual return to sports, gym and heavier manual work

#### **Note:**

- Pain felt at the AC joint is normal to experience for up to 3 months
- Pain may be noticed during recovery as loading increases with exercises or work - modify accordingly
- Full recovery of strength and function is usually 3 months

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### Your rehabilitation journey

Recovery after AC joint debridement is typically faster than many other shoulder procedures. Most patients regain good movement and function within a few months. Following your physiotherapy program and gradually increasing activity levels is important to support recovery.

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### Important note

These guidelines provide a general framework for recovery. Any specific instructions provided by Dr Richard Dallalana, whether written or verbal, should be followed in preference to these guidelines.