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AC Joint Injuries: Weight-Lifting Exercises to Avoid

Adapted from Ollie Odebunmi, Demand Media

The acromioclavicular joint, also known as the AC joint, is at the top most point of your shoulder where the collar bone attaches to the shoulder. AC joint injuries are caused by repetitive trauma, falls on the shoulder joint or certain weightlifting exercises. But you don't have to abandon your weightlifting program. Simply modify your technique and avoid the exercises that cause discomfort.

The Bench Press

Avoid full range of motion barbell or dumbbell bench presses. Excessive stress on the AC joint occurs when your elbows drop below your body on the downward motion. Using heavy weights compounds the problem. The bench press is often seen as a test of strength by weightlifters, and many do the exercise too frequently with near-maximal weights. Limit the stress on your AC joint by not bench pressing every week. Use a towel roll or do the bench press on the floor to prevent the elbows from dropping past the body.

Fly's

Flat bench or incline bench dumbbell fly's with dumbbells lowered in a wide arc out to the sides overextends the shoulder joints. The stress and risk of injury to the AC joint increases if your elbows drop below your body to get a full stretch of the pectorals. Machine fly's gripping a bar or handles or with forearms against a pad also overextend your shoulder joints on the negative phase of the movement as your elbows travel beyond your shoulder joints.



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Behind-the-Neck Barbell Press

The behind-the-neck barbell press was a staple shoulder exercise for weightlifters and old-time bodybuilders such as Reg Park and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1960s and 70s. But it is an exercise you should avoid. The exercise involves extreme external rotation of the shoulder joints -- moving your shoulders away from the midline of your body -- and limits the ability of the rotator cuff muscles to stabilize the shoulder joints. Pulling your elbows beyond your shoulders as you perform the exercise overextends your shoulder joints and places excessive stress on your AC joints.

Behind-the-Head Lat Pull-downs

Avoid behind-the-head lat pull-downs. This is due to the fact that it causes you to over-extending your shoulder joints with your elbows behind your shoulders as you pull the bar down, therefore it increases the risk of injuring your AC joints.

Lateral Raises

Don't include dumbbell, cable or machine lateral raises for your deltoids in your weightlifting program if you have any pain in your AC joint. Exercises that involve moving your arm laterally from the midline of your body exacerbate AC joint injuries.

Upright Rows

Avoid barbell and dumbbell upright rows for your deltoids and upper trapezius. The internal rotation of your shoulder joints -- moving your shoulders toward the midline of your body -- with added resistance creates pressure on your AC joint. Particularly, if your body drops too low on the downward motion -- upper arms beyond parallel to the floor. The risk of further injury to your AC joint outweighs any potential benefit of the exercise. Behind-the-neck pull-ups for your lats involve extreme external rotation of your shoulders and place excessive pressure on your AC joints.



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Other Exercises

Bar dips for the chest and triceps place considerable stress on the AC joint, particularly if your body drops too low on the downward motion – upper arms beyond parallel to the floor. The risk of further injury to your AC joint outweighs any potential benefit of the exercise. Behind-the-neck pull-ups for your lats involve extreme external rotation of your shoulders and place excessive pressure on your AC joints.



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