

How Sternoclavicular Joint Injuries Happen in Car Accidents

Understanding a Rare but Painful Shoulder Injury After a Crash

A [serious car accident](#) changes more than your daily routine. It can leave you dealing with unexpected injuries that cause long-lasting pain and require costly medical care. One often overlooked injury after a collision is a [sternoclavicular \(SC\) joint injury](#). This is a condition that affects the area where your collarbone meets your breastbone. It might not get as much attention as fractures or whiplash, but it can have a devastating impact on your life.

At [Smith & Hassler](#), we know how traumatic a crash can be, especially when it leads to complex injuries that disrupt your ability to work, care for your family, or simply move without discomfort. Our Houston car accident lawyers are here to help you pursue the full compensation you deserve for medical bills, lost income, and pain and suffering tied to these injuries.

What Is the Sternoclavicular Joint and Why Does It Matter?

The sternoclavicular joint sits at the center of your chest where the clavicle (collarbone) meets the sternum (breastbone). This small but important joint helps anchor your shoulders and allows a wide range of arm movements. Because of its role in supporting the upper body, any damage to this joint can severely limit how you lift, push, pull, or even reach for objects.

Unlike many joints that rely on tight-fitting bone structures, the SC joint is stabilized by strong ligaments and surrounding tissues. This design provides mobility but also makes it vulnerable to dislocations and ligament injuries during violent impacts.

How Car Accidents Cause Sternoclavicular Joint Injuries

Car accidents often generate powerful forces that travel through your body on impact. When you brace for a crash, the [seat belt](#) holds you in place, but the shoulder harness can press against the clavicle with tremendous force. Additionally, sudden twisting or jerking motions may cause the joint to be pulled in unnatural directions.

Some common crash scenarios that lead to SC joint injuries include:

- [Head-on collisions](#) that force the upper body forward against the seat belt or steering wheel.
- [T-bone accidents](#) where the shoulder is jolted sideways, stressing the joint.
- [Rear-end crashes](#) that cause sudden whiplash-like motions extending through the shoulders and chest.

While many people expect to see collarbone fractures after these kinds of accidents, the force can damage the soft tissues around the SC joint instead. In severe cases, the joint can dislocate either forward (anterior dislocation) or backward (posterior dislocation).

Why SC Joint Injuries Are Dangerous

Most people think of shoulder injuries as painful but not life-threatening. However, sternoclavicular joint injuries can be more serious than they appear. If the joint dislocates backward toward the chest cavity, it can press against or injure critical structures, such as major blood vessels, the trachea (windpipe), or nerves leading to the arm.

Symptoms of a sternoclavicular joint injury may include:

- Pain and swelling near the center of the chest or base of the neck.
- A visible bump or deformity where the collarbone meets the sternum.
- Difficulty moving the shoulder or arm without pain.
- A feeling of instability, like the collarbone might slide out of place.
- Shortness of breath or trouble swallowing in more severe cases.

Because of the risk of complications, it is crucial to seek prompt medical evaluation after a crash if you have chest pain or any unusual shoulder symptoms.

How Doctors Diagnose and Treat SC Joint Injuries

These injuries can be tricky to spot on standard X-rays. Doctors often order special imaging, such as CT scans, to confirm a diagnosis and determine whether the dislocation is anterior or posterior. This distinction matters greatly because posterior dislocations require more urgent attention due to the potential for life-threatening complications.

Treatment varies based on the severity and type of injury. For less severe ligament sprains or minor anterior dislocations, doctors might recommend rest, a sling, and physical therapy. In cases of posterior dislocation or persistent instability, surgery may be needed to repair or stabilize the joint. Rehabilitation can be lengthy and often requires patience and consistent follow-up care.

Why You Need a Lawyer for an SC Joint Injury After a Crash

Sternoclavicular joint injuries can significantly disrupt your life. You may not be able to return to your job, especially if it involves lifting or manual tasks. Even daily activities like driving, carrying groceries, or picking up your child can become painful challenges.

On top of the physical toll, these injuries often come with steep medical expenses. Imaging tests, consultations with orthopedic specialists, physical therapy, and possible [surgeries](#) add up quickly. If someone else caused the accident, you should not be left to handle these costs alone.

Insurance companies are known for downplaying the seriousness of [soft tissue injuries](#). They might argue that your shoulder pain is a minor sprain or blame it on age-related wear. Without strong legal representation, you could end up accepting a settlement that does not come close to covering your future needs.

At Smith & Hassler, our experienced Houston attorneys know how to prove the impact of these unique injuries. We work with trusted medical experts who can explain the long-term consequences of a sternoclavicular joint injury. We also gather detailed evidence to demonstrate how your injury limits your work and quality of life.

What Compensation Can Cover After an SC Joint Injury

If a negligent driver caused your sternoclavicular joint injury, you have the right to pursue compensation for a range of damages, including:

- Medical expenses for emergency care, imaging, treatment, rehabilitation, and future surgeries.
- Lost wages if you had to miss work during recovery.
- Loss of earning capacity if your injury affects your long-term ability to work.
- Pain and suffering for the physical pain and emotional distress you have endured.
- Loss of enjoyment of life if you can no longer participate in activities you once enjoyed.

Our legal team fights to make sure insurance companies do not undervalue your claim. We prepare every case thoroughly, with an eye toward trial if necessary, to put you in the strongest position for maximum compensation.

Steps to Take if You Suspect an SC Joint Injury After a Car Accident

If you were recently in a car accident and suspect a sternoclavicular joint injury, taking the right steps can protect your health and your legal rights:

- **Seek immediate medical care.** Even if symptoms seem mild at first, shoulder and chest pain after a crash should always be evaluated by a doctor.
- **Follow all medical recommendations.** Attend every follow-up appointment and stick to your physical therapy plan. This not only helps you heal but also builds important medical documentation of your injury.
- **Document everything.** Keep records of medical visits, medications, time missed from work, and how the injury affects your daily life.
- **Do not talk to the other driver's insurance company without your lawyer.** They may try to get you to say something that hurts your case.
- **Contact an experienced car accident lawyer.** The sooner you involve a legal professional, the better your chances of building a strong claim.

Get a Houston Car Accident Lawyer Who Takes Your SC Joint Injury Seriously

We understand that injuries like a sternoclavicular joint dislocation are often misunderstood or overlooked after a car wreck. That's why we take pride in standing up for people facing difficult recoveries and holding negligent drivers accountable.

For more than 30 years, [our Houston law firm](#) has helped injured Texans rebuild their lives. If you are suffering after a car accident, let us take on the legal battle so you can focus on healing. Our consultations are free, and you do not pay us unless we secure compensation for you.

[Contact us today](#) to discuss your case with a knowledgeable Houston car accident attorney. We are ready to listen to your story and fight for the justice you deserve.