

Collar Bone Fractures in Newborns

Fracture of the collar bone is a common birth injury. It is caused by pressure on that area during birth. Although it sounds serious, collar bone fracture usually heals very quickly, often with no need for treatment.

What is collar bone fracture?

The collar bone, or clavicle, is the bone running from the breast bone to the shoulder. Fracture of the collar bone is a common birth injury. Fracture means the bone is broken; it could be a complete break or just a partial crack.

The fracture is caused by pressure on your baby's body as he or she passes through the birth canal. Collar bone fracture is more likely to occur with difficult deliveries, especially when delivering the shoulder in babies born head first. Large babies tend to have more difficult deliveries.

Your baby may be unable to move the arm on the affected side. However, many babies with a fractured collar bone have no symptoms at all. Since bone develops so rapidly in newborn babies, these fractures heal very quickly. The doctor may temporarily splint the arm on the side of the fractured collar bone. However, your baby may need no treatment.

What does it look like?

- Your baby may not be able to move one arm as much as the other. The area of the fracture may feel irregular to the doctor; it may feel “sponge-like” when pressed. The doctor may notice other abnormalities, such as a sound when moving the shoulder or lack of normal reflexes on that side.
- Your baby may be fussy, especially when the arm is moved. However, the injury often goes unnoticed.
- Other babies with collar bone fractures have mild or no symptoms. Your baby's fracture may not be recognized until you or the doctor notice a lump on the collar bone. The lump is new bone formed during healing.

What are some possible complications of collar bone fracture?

Complications are rare. Sometimes, the forces that cause collar bone fracture can also cause damage to the nerves of the arm.

What increases your baby's risk of collar bone fracture?

- Newborn's shoulder getting stuck in the birth canal during normal “head first” birth.
- Baby is larger size than usual.
- Longer than term pregnancy (beyond due date).
- Assisted delivery—for example, use of a vacuum device during birth.

Can collar bone fracture be prevented?

Most of the time, there is no way to prevent this fracture.

How is collar bone fracture treated?

- Your baby may not need treatment at all. Depending on the situation, the doctor may recommend immobilizing the arm (keeping it from moving too much). This is usually done by pinning clothing around the arm so it can't move.
- If the injury seems to be causing pain, give acetaminophen drops or other pain medication.
- The bones grow very rapidly in newborns. As a result, collar bone fractures heal very quickly. You may be able to feel strong new bone (callus) developing at the fracture area as early as 1 week.

When should I call your office?

The doctor will check your baby until the fracture has healed and he or she can move the arm normally. Call the doctor if the baby is not moving the arm normally or seems irritable after 1 to 2 weeks.

