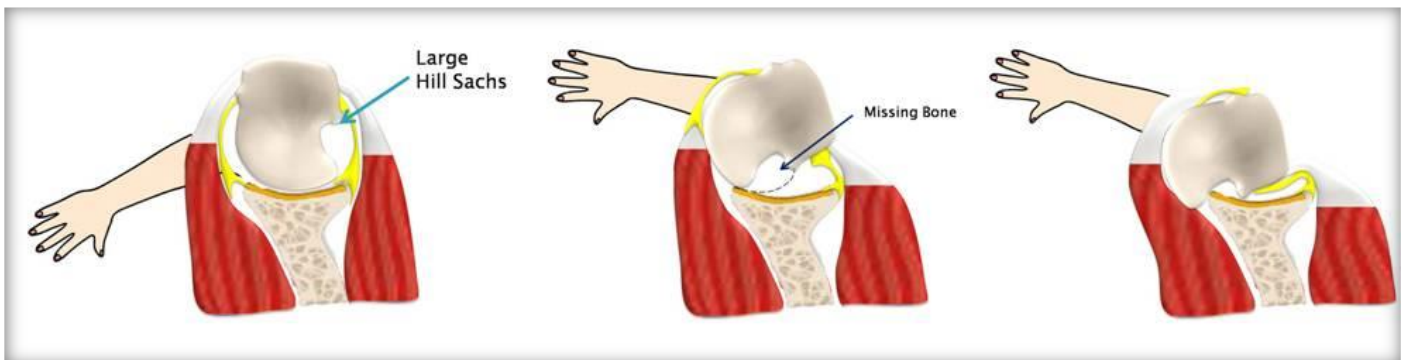


## WHEN DOES AN UNSTABLE SHOULDER NEED SURGERY?

**Is a shoulder unstable after one dislocation? Or only after multiple dislocations?** It is important to identify which shoulder dislocations will respond long-term to non-operative treatment and which shoulders require early surgical intervention.

**When assessing a patient who has a history of shoulder dislocation:**

- Identify those shoulders with positive "**apprehension sign**" at 45° of shoulder abduction as opposed to those who only have a positive sign closer to 90° abduction and external rotation
- Identify those shoulders that may have an "**engaging Hill-Sachs lesion**" on CT or MRI scans *i.e.* those who have a large bony Bankhart lesion (traumatic glenoid defect) and/or a large Hill-Sachs lesion (traumatic posterior humeral defect)



**Patients with** the above clinical and radiological signs are more likely to have episodes of recurrent dislocation of the shoulder. Unfortunately with each subsequent dislocation, the damage to the glenoid or humeral head may become more significant and make the stabilization procedure more invasive (open rather than arthroscopic) and complex (bone grafting of the glenoid).

**Patients without** a markedly positive apprehension test and minimal bone damage to the glenoid and/or humerus *i.e.* mainly a soft tissue avulsion of the anterior glenohumeral ligaments (soft tissue Bankhart lesion) are more likely benefit from a physiotherapy rehabilitation program and avoidance of contact sports for three months.

**An experienced physiotherapist is essential** in the early management of an acute shoulder dislocation with minimal bone damage. If a second dislocation occurs then surgical stabilization is probably indicated. Shoulders with significant bony defects, especially in patients under 25, should not await the almost inevitable second dislocation. **The surgical management of shoulder instability** has improved significantly over the last decade due to a better understanding of shoulder anatomy and function as well as improved surgical techniques.