

# Chest Injury

## Patient information

You have been given this information leaflet because you have been diagnosed with a chest injury.

Broken (fractured) ribs are usually caused by a fall or blow to the chest. Occasionally this can occur by severe coughing, straining, or sports injuries. Sometimes the ribs are not broken, but there is bruising of ribs or nearby muscles.

Children and babies are less likely to fracture ribs because their bones are more elastic. So, if a young child or baby has a rib fracture, it is important to know what caused the injury.

**Symptoms of a chest injury can include:**

- Pain on deep breathing, moving, or coughing.
- Tenderness of the injured area when pressed.
- Bruising to the chest wall.
- Mild shortness of breath.

## Treating a Chest Injury

**Rib fractures may not show on an x-ray. If you have undergone an x-ray this is to check for complications such as a pneumothorax (collapsed lung).** Therefore, if complications are not suspected and you are otherwise well, you may not need an X-ray.

It's important you try to breathe normally to help clear mucus from your lungs and prevent chest infections. The best way to facilitate this is with regular pain killers. This is especially important for people who are more prone to chest infections, such as smokers and people with persistent (chronic) chest conditions.

In most cases, you can take care of broken or bruised ribs at home.

**The following may also help:**

- Avoiding strenuous physical labour.
- Keeping mobile between rest periods – walking around can help with your breathing and help clear any mucus from your lungs.
- Holding a pillow against your chest if you need to cough.
- Breathing exercises – take slow deep breaths letting your lungs inflate fully each time, and breathe out with pursed lips.

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## Recovering from a Chest Injury

Chest injuries can be very painful, but will normally improve within about three to six weeks. Seek immediate medical assistance if any of the following occur:

- Increased shortness of breath.
- Coughing up blood.

## Treating Pain

If needed, painkiller options include the following:

**Paracetamol** is usually recommended for painful sprains or strains.

**Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling. You can buy some types (eg, ibuprofen) at pharmacies, without a prescription either topically as a cream, or as tablets. You should check the medication advice leaflet to ensure you are safe to take these i.e some patients with asthma or stomach ulcers may not be able to.

If this does not help, you may need an additional stronger painkiller – such as codeine – you should discuss this with your pharmacist or GP.

## Further Information

For further advice and information about your condition:

Please choose from the following:

- 'NHS Patient Choices' website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- 'Making Lives Better' patient website: [www.patient.info](http://www.patient.info)
- Telephone NHS 111
- Contact your General Practitioner

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Version 1, Issue Date: October 2018, Revision Date: October 2020