

# Chest injury

## Emergency Department Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a chest injury. It includes information about what causes chest injuries, how they are treated and what to do when you get home.

### What causes a chest injury?

Broken (fractured) or bruised ribs are usually caused by a fall or blow to the chest, or occasionally by severe coughing. They can be very painful, but will normally improve within about six to eight weeks.

### What are the symptoms?

A broken or bruised rib will feel very painful particularly when you breathe in, and you may feel you can only take shallow breaths. However, it is important to try and breathe normally to help clear mucus from your lungs and prevent chest infections.

You may also have some swelling on your chest and bruising on the skin.

## How is it diagnosed?

The healthcare practitioner who sees you in the Emergency Department will examine you. He/she will let you know if they think you need an X-ray. X-rays are often not needed because treatment for a single broken rib or bruising is usually the same.

## How can I care for my injury?

Your ribs should heal gradually over six to eight weeks. You can help by:

- Regularly taking painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, if you can take them (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose).
- Holding an ice pack wrapped in a tea towel on your chest regularly during the first few days to reduce the pain and swelling. You can use a bag of frozen vegetables if you do not have an ice pack.
- Resting regularly – you may have to take time off work especially if your work involves physical labour or the pain is severe.
- Keeping moving in between rest periods. Walking around and moving your shoulders occasionally can help with your breathing and help clear any mucus from your lungs.
- Holding a pillow against your chest if you need to cough.
- Carrying out breathing exercises to help keep your lungs clear. Take 10 slow, deep breaths every hour, letting your lungs inflate fully each time.

## What precautions should I take?

### Do not:

- Wrap a bandage tightly around your chest as this will stop your lungs expanding properly.
- Take any cough medicine. Not clearing mucus from your lungs can lead to a serious chest infection.
- Lie down or stay still for long periods.

- Strain or lift heavy objects until you are feeling better, as you may injure yourself further and take longer to recover.

If you smoke, stopping may also help your recovery. If you would like help with stopping smoking, contact your local pharmacy or GP for assistance.

## **What should I look out for at home?**

Call NHS 111 or return to the Emergency Department immediately if you get any of the following:

- Increasing shortness of breath.
- A high temperature (fever).
- Coughing up blood.
- Abdominal pain.
- Blood visible in your urine.

Seek a review with your GP urgently if you have any of the following:

- Uncontrolled pain (not able to take deep breaths or cough despite taking regular painkillers).

Advise the GP receptionist of your symptoms and anticipate a same day review to address your pain relief. If this is not achieved, you are at risk of developing a chest infection associated with only taking shallow breaths.

## **Follow-up care**

You should not usually need any follow-up care. However, if you have queries or concerns when you get home, please contact your GP or NHS 111.

## Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

### NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rib-injuries/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to one of our nurses. If you need help when you return home, please contact your GP.

### This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/accident-emergency/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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