

Chest Injury Advice

What are the causes of chest wall injuries?

- ♦ Fractured ribs (broken ribs)
- ♦ Fractured sternum (breastbone)
- ♦ Chest wall bruising
- ♦ Muscular sprains
- ♦ Sprained inter-costal muscles (the muscles between and supporting the ribs)

The most common cause of chest wall injuries in elderly people is a fall from height or from standing. In adults, road traffic collisions are the most common cause. Rib fractures in young people usually happen as a result of accidents arising from recreational and athletic activities. Because children have more elastic ribs, they are less likely than adults to sustain fractures following blunt chest trauma.

What symptoms might I have?

- strong pain in your chest area, particularly when you breathe in
- swelling or tenderness around the affected ribs
- sometimes bruising on the skin
- feeling or hearing a crack if it's a broken rib

Why do I have pain?

Injuries of the chest wall can be very painful. To breathe you have to move your chest wall, so deep breathing and coughing will hurt, but they are an important part in making a full recovery. It will normally take around 4 weeks to get better. As a guide, if you have one broken or bruised rib you can expect to be in pain for three weeks and to be in discomfort for several more weeks and even longer if more than one rib is involved. It may be helpful to sleep sitting upright for the first few nights.

What is the treatment?

Ribs can't be easily splinted or supported like other bones, so they're usually left to heal naturally, and it is not always necessary to x-ray the chest. You may have a tracing of the heart taken (ECG) if the clinician thinks it necessary. The main complication is that chest injuries may affect breathing: pain from rib fractures can stop you from breathing as deeply as normal and this can lead to a chest infection. This risk is higher in those who smoke and have chronic chest conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or heart failure. Broken or bruised ribs heal in the same way and usually get better by themselves within 3 to 6 weeks.

When do I need to get medical help?

Go to your nearest Emergency department at once if:

- You become short of breath
- You start to cough up coloured or blood-stained phlegm (sputum)
- If your cough increases dramatically, you develop a temperature or feel generally unwell with a temperature
- You have pain in your tummy

What do I take for Pain?

Pain relief taken regularly is the most important treatment, so that you can breathe and cough properly.

Take regular **Paracetamol**, rather than every now and then. They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol.

If Paracetamol doesn't help at all despite taking the recommended dose then try changing to Ibuprofen 400 mg three times a day.

You can also take both drugs – speak to a pharmacist about the best way to do this. If you have been advised not to take Ibuprofen in the past or are on any blood thinning tablets then avoid Ibuprofen.

With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.

Anti-inflammatory painkillers (like Ibuprofen) can be used.

These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them.

Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either. You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies.

Exercises

Begin these exercises as soon as you can - provided they don't cause excessive pain. The repetitions and sets are a guideline.

How to tell if you're exercising at the right level:

When doing exercise you should listen to your pain levels, especially in the early stages. You may find that these exercises increase your symptoms slightly in the beginning. However, they should get easier over time. It can be helpful to rate your pain out of 10 (0 being no pain and 10 being the worst pain you have ever had), for example:

Green 1 to 3 - mild pain

Amber 4 to 6 – moderate pain

Red 7 to 10 - severe pain

Aim to keep your pain within a rating of 0 to 5. If your pain gets above this level, you can change the exercises by:

- reducing the number of times, you do a movement
- reducing the speed of a movement
- increasing rest time between movements

1. Rotation: Sit up straight, with your arms across your chest Keeping your legs still, gently rotate to one side as far as you can go without pain and provided you feel no more than a mild to moderate stretch. Repeat for the other side.

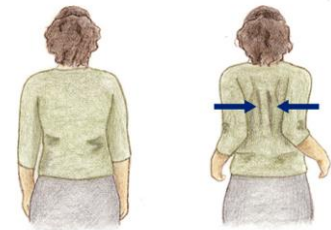
Hold for 1 – 2 seconds Repeat 10 times to each side



2. Deep Breathing: Every hour take 10 long, deep breaths to make sure that air gets to every bit of the lung. First, breathe into the bottom of your lungs, and then breathe deeper, making your ribs move upwards and outwards. Breathe out.

3. Shoulder Blade Squeezes: Begin sitting or standing tall with your back straight. Squeeze your shoulder blades together as far as you can go without pain and provided you feel no more than a mild to moderate stretch.

Hold for 1-2 seconds Repeat 10 times



4. Huffing: Twice a day you should take a deep breath in, and then force your breath out quickly- as if your were steaming up a mirror before wiping it clean - making a 'huffing' sound.

The following advice should also help you to recover.

Things you should do:	Things you shouldn't do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen • Keep moving around your home and sometimes move your shoulders to help you breathe and clear mucus from your lungs • Hold an ice pack (or bag of frozen peas in a tea towel) to the affected ribs regularly in the first few days to bring down swelling • rest and take time off work if you need to • breathe normally and cough when you need to – this helps clear mucus from your lungs to prevent chest infections • Do regular deep breathing exercises - take a very deep breath in through your nose, out through your mouth slowly. Do this 10 times every hour. • Cough if you need to. Press firmly on the sore part of your chest (hold a pillow against your chest) if coughing hurts. • try to sleep more upright for the first few nights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to lift heavy things or strain yourself • Lie down or stay still for a long time • Try to strap up or bind your ribs. This will stop your lungs expanding properly which can be harmful. • Play any contact sports or do any exercise that makes your pain worse for 4 weeks • Try to suppress any cough - it's important to clear the sputum so it doesn't collect and cause an infection • Take a cough syrup • Smoke – stopping smoking may also help your recovery. If you need help and advice to stop smoking contact the free Help Me Quit helpline on 0800 085

- **Aim to alternate periods of rest with gentle activity over the next few weeks - keeping mobile will help to drain the normal lung secretions and prevent complications.**

2219 or visit
<https://www.helpmequit.wales/>

If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact the Emergency Department at Grange University Hospital (Not a Minor injury unit)

References: Broken or bruised ribs - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Chest-injuries-and-rib-fractures

<https://www.physioadvisor.com.au/injuries/upper-back-chest/rib-fracture/>

If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant Emergency Department: Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287

Or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):

Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056

Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073

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