

Chest wall injury

You have been diagnosed as having a chest wall injury. Having been examined we feel you are well enough to return home but there are some important points for you to remember. This leaflet provides advice and guidance to patients with fractured (broken) ribs, sternum (breast bone) or muscular bruising.

What is a chest wall injury?

Your chest wall contains 12 ribs on each side which connect your spine at the back to your sternum at the front. Between each rib is a layer of muscle. Injury to your chest wall is either bruising of the muscles or a break in one or more of your ribs or your sternum, which will cause pain.

Why is it important?

Injuries to the chest wall can be very painful. Normally, your chest wall moves every time you breathe in. Additionally, you take deep breaths and cough in order to clear secretions from your lungs. If you do not breathe deeply or cough because you are in pain, you will be more prone to getting a chest infection. You might also find it difficult to lie down comfortably.

What do I need to do?

It is important that you take regular pain relief to reduce your pain. This should allow you to breathe, cough and move around more comfortably. Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can help with this and can be bought over the counter without a prescription. You may need your doctor to prescribe something stronger if these are not sufficient to control the pain.

Do the breathing exercise overleaf at regular intervals.

Continued overleaf...

Breathing exercises

- Aim to take 10 deep breaths every hour.
- Do these in whatever position is most comfortable for you.
- Breathe in through your nose which will warm, filter and humidify the air. Sigh it out through your mouth.

What else may help?

- If you feel the need to cough – don't suppress it.
- You may find it helpful to support your chest with a pillow when coughing.
- Take regular pain relief. It is important that you can move about reasonably normally.
- If it is painful to sit upright, try rolling onto your side first.
- Do not take cough medicine.

What should I look out for?

You may have pain for up to 3-4 weeks but this should gradually improve over that time.

Seek further medical advice if you experience any of the following:

- you become short of breath
- your sputum becomes discoloured or more productive
- you become unwell with a temperature.

For further advice contact:

- Your GP
- NHS 111
- Your nearest emergency department.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690