



Information for patients, relatives and carers

Rib/Chest Injury

Rib injuries can be very painful, but they heal with minimal treatment and do not require any strapping.

On many occasions, for isolated rib fracture or bruising, it is not necessary for a chest x-ray. We can treat and advise you after clinical examination.

To ease the pain and discomfort of rib injuries you should:

- ✓ Take painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen – though avoid taking ibuprofen for 48 hours after your injury as it may slow down healing
- ✓ Hold an ice pack (or a 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
- ✓ If you need to cough, hold a pillow against your chest
- ✓ Walk around and sometimes move your shoulders to help you breathe and clear mucus from your lungs
- ✓ Take 10 slow, deep breaths every hour to help clear your lungs
- ✓ Try to sleep more upright for the first few nights

To ease the pain and discomfort of rib injuries, you should NOT:

- ✗ Wrap a bandage tightly around your chest to stop your lungs expanding properly
- ✗ Lie down or stay still for a long time
- ✗ Strain yourself or lift heavy objects
- ✗ Play any sports or do any exercise that makes your pain worse
- ✗ Smoke – stopping smoking may also help your recovery

It is not unusual for rib injuries to become more painful before they improve. You may notice a slight increase in pain and discomfort about five to 10 days after the injury. This is normal and nothing to worry about.

A bruised or fractured rib can take three to six weeks to heal if you are concerned about returning to work or sport please consult your GP.

If you develop any breathing difficulties, an increase or discolouration of phlegm or cough up blood you should contact your GP for further assessment.

① If you have further concerns about your condition, please contact your GP. If you are not sure what to do, call 111 or get help from 111 online: <https://111.nhs.uk/> [When to use NHS 111 - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print, Easy Read or audio, please ask the staff who are looking after you.

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