

Patient information

Chest injuries

Emergency Care – Royal Liverpool Hospital

Injuries to the chest usually cause bruising to the muscles beneath the skin. Occasionally ribs can be broken. An X-ray is not always needed, as treatment of broken ribs and bruising is the same.

It is usual to feel pain on deep breathing, coughing, laughing or stretching. You may feel a sharp pain or click when you move. It is natural to want to breath less deeply, but it is very important to make sure that your lungs are still fully expanded to reduce the risks of developing a chest infection. You can ensure this with pain killers and exercises – see below.

Do:

Take pain relief:

Pain relieving tablets work better if taken regularly. The pain should settle within three weeks but may take longer if you have broken a rib/ribs.

- Take two paracetamol tablets every four-six hours (up to four doses in 24 hours), if you weigh less than 50kg (7 stone 7lb) only take one tablet (up to four doses in 24 hours).
- Take ibuprofen 400mg every six-eight hours with food if you have been advised this is safe by your doctor.
- Take any additional pain relief as prescribed by your doctor.

Do chest exercises:

Position

Sit upright with your feet on the floor or lie on your uninjured side.

Frequency

Practise the breathing exercises four times a day or hourly if you are coughing anything up.

Breathing exercises:

1. Take four slow deep breaths then one 'huff' (This means breath out hard and sharp through an open mouth as if misting a mirror).
2. Rest for a few minutes.
3. Continue with four slow deep breaths then support yourself to cough, (i.e. hug your injured side with both arms or with a pillow for support).

Don't:

- Strain yourself, lift heavy objects, do contact sports or heavy exercise while still in pain doing your day-to-day activities.
- Do not stay laid down or still for long periods of time.
- Do not smoke.

If you become more breathless, start coughing more or green/yellow/brown phlegm or your pain is not controlled with your regular pain relief then seek medical help either via your GP, walk in centre. Call 999 or return to the Emergency Department in an emergency.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and can influence care in the future. Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take your time to test back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

If you need any further information, please contact:

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