



Chest injury: aftercare advice

Information for patients from the Emergency Department

Please speak to a healthcare professional before following the advice below

Chest injuries are common and often very painful. The most likely cause of your pain is bruising of your muscles. If you bruised your arm or leg you could rest it, but you need to breathe with your chest so it never gets to rest and the pain continues.

Most chest injuries do not break ribs. Even a broken rib is no longer strapped up. This is because, painful as your injured ribs are, the lung underneath is more important and must be allowed to expand properly or it gets sludgy and infected.

Will I need an x-ray?

If you come to hospital with a chest injury, you will have an examination. After this examination the doctor / nurse will only order a chest x-ray if they think there is a complication, such as a punctured lung or bleeding into your chest, which is rare. Not all chest injuries are x-rayed.

Will it hurt for long?

Your pain may get worse after a few days, usually as you start to move around more, which causes movement at the fracture site. For reasons that no one understands, chest injuries feel worse on the third to the 10th day afterwards, but the pain can last up to six to eight weeks. This is normal and the pain should eventually pass.

What treatment will I be given?

- Treatment should include taking regular **painkillers** (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen) as advised by the doctor or nurse.
- You can use **ice (or a cold flannel)** to ease the pain, by wrapping crushed ice in a damp towel and placing it over your injury. Leave the ice in place for 15 minutes, then remove. Do this every four to six hours during the day.
Caution: ice can cause burns, so do not put it directly on your skin, always use a towel. Protect sensitive skin with baby oil.

How can I help my injury get better?

- **Stop smoking.** Smoking kills the lining of the lung, which is needed to clear away debris and help your lungs work better.
- **Breathing exercises.** It is important to do these several times a day (at least four times a day). Take a deep breath in to the bottom of your lungs, hold for five seconds, and breathe out. Repeat four times. If your chest is very sore, it may help to support / hold your chest whilst you do this.
- **Coughing** is painful but important. Cough if you feel you need to. If this hurts it may help to support your ribs with your hand and / or a cushion while coughing.

Will I need a follow-up appointment?

No. A follow-up appointment is not normally needed, but if you start feeling unwell, have shortness of breath, or are coughing up coloured sputum (spit), contact your GP immediately.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals website (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/information-for-patients/patient-information/>).

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