

# **PATIENT INFORMATION**

## **Rib Fractures and Chest Injury**

**Accident & Emergency Department**



## **INTRODUCTION**

This leaflet will give you information about the injury to your chest wall including:

- Fractured ribs
- Fractured sternum (breastbone)
- Chest wall bruising

Injuries to the chest can be very painful. Unlike other parts of your body, you are unable to rest it as you use it to breathe, support yourself and move.

Pain is one of the main problems experienced with chest injuries. The pain may continue for several weeks depending on the type of injury you have. As a rough guide, a fracture to the ribs or sternum (breastbone) takes about 6 weeks to heal and it can be usual to experience discomfort after this time. Bruising can take 4 – 6 weeks to heal. Time scale for healing can vary.

## **Complications**

Taking deep breaths and coughing are all normal actions that our bodies do every day. They help us to avoid developing chest infections by clearing any sputum (phlegm) you may have on your chest.

Chest infections are one of the most common complications after suffering a chest injury. The pain from a chest injury makes it more difficult to take a deep breath in a cough. Combined with the fact that you may not be able to move

around as much as usual can mean you are more likely to develop an infection.

If you have a pre-existing chest condition such as COPD, Bronchiectasis or asthma, you are at a particularly high risk of chest infection.

## **TREATMENT**

The most important thing you can do is prevent getting a chest infection.

### **DO:**

- Take regular pain relief as prescribed or advised. This will help you to be able to move around, take a deep breath and cough.
- Keep mobile (walking). This will make you take deeper breaths and clear any sputum (phlegm).
- Cough when you need to, you can use your hand or a pillow to support the area of your chest when you cough.
- Keep hydrated
- Take 5 slow, deep breaths every hour during the day
- You may be given an incentive spirometer to encourage you to take deep breaths. If you are, you will be given specific guidance how to use it.

### **DON'T:**

- Stay lying down or stay still for long periods.
- Lift, pull or push anything which makes the pain worse.

## **WHAT SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN YOU GET HOME**

Even after following the advice given, some people may still develop a chest infection after being discharged home.

Please seek urgent medical advice from your GP or re-attend the Accident & Emergency Department if you experience any of the following:

- Your sputum (phlegm) becomes discoloured
- You become unwell with a temperature
- Your start coughing up blood
- You become short of breath (feel like you are breathing fast)
- Feeling lightheaded often

Other instructions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you are concerned or have a query, please contact:

**A&E Department  
Tel: 01704 704652 (and ask for the therapy team)**

*Please retain this leaflet for future reference*





**Please call 01704 704714 if you need  
this leaflet in an alternative format**

**Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust**

Ormskirk & District General Hospital  
Wigan Road, Ormskirk, L39 2AZ  
Tel: (01695) 577111

Southport & Formby District General Hospital  
Town Lane, Kew, Southport, PR8 6PN  
Tel: (01704) 547471

**FOR APPOINTMENTS**

Telephone (01695) 656680  
Email [soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net](mailto:soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net)

We would welcome your feedback about your experience  
at Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust.

Please access the Friends and Family Test at the following  
link:

<https://www.southportandormskirk.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/fft/>  
**Thank you**

Author/Owner: Adelle McNamara

Ref: 515

Version: 6

Reviewed: January 2023

Next Review: January 2026