

## EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT AND MINOR INJURY UNITS

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## CHEST WALL INJURY

Falls or blows to the chest can lead to bruising or fractures (breaks) of the ribs. These can both be very painful conditions and unlike other areas of the body, it is difficult to rest your chest as you use it to breathe and it supports you when you lie or sit down. X-rays may not show fractures even when they are present and are therefore only required when an internal injury is suspected.

Pain can last up to **6 weeks** but will gradually subside after the first few weeks. Pain often gets worse after the first few days before it starts to improve.

### TREATMENT

- Take pain-killers, e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen, regularly
- Perform regular breathing exercises (see below)
- Keep mobile (e.g. walking)
- Local heat may prove beneficial, e.g. a covered hot water bottle placed over the injury.
- Don't stay lying down or sit still for long periods of time

### BREATHING EXERCISES

Do breathing exercises regularly to prevent complications

- Place your hand over the injured area.
- Take in a deep breath.
- Hold for 5- 10 seconds, then cough.
- If it is too painful to cough, "huff" instead.
- Repeat 5 times every hour.
- Try to cough as soon as you can.

### RETURNING TO WORK

If your job involves a lot of manual handling/lifting, it may be necessary to discuss with your employer whether you can do other duties while your injury heals. It may be helpful to discuss with your GP if you have other concerns.

### COMPLICATIONS

Chest infections are one of the most common complications after suffering a chest injury. Because you may be in pain, this can mean you are uncomfortable when trying to take a deep breath or to cough up sputum, making you more likely to develop a chest infection.

**If you develop any of the following symptoms contact your own doctor or the Emergency Department on the above number:**

- **Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing**
- **Coughing up any blood**
- **Coughing up thick, green coloured mucus**

We may contact you at home after you have been discharged, to ask if you are interested in being involved in a research study. You are free to refuse this and it will have no impact on your treatment.