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# ***Recovering after chest wall injuries***

***Information for  
patients and carers***

**Physiotherapy and Acute Pain Service**



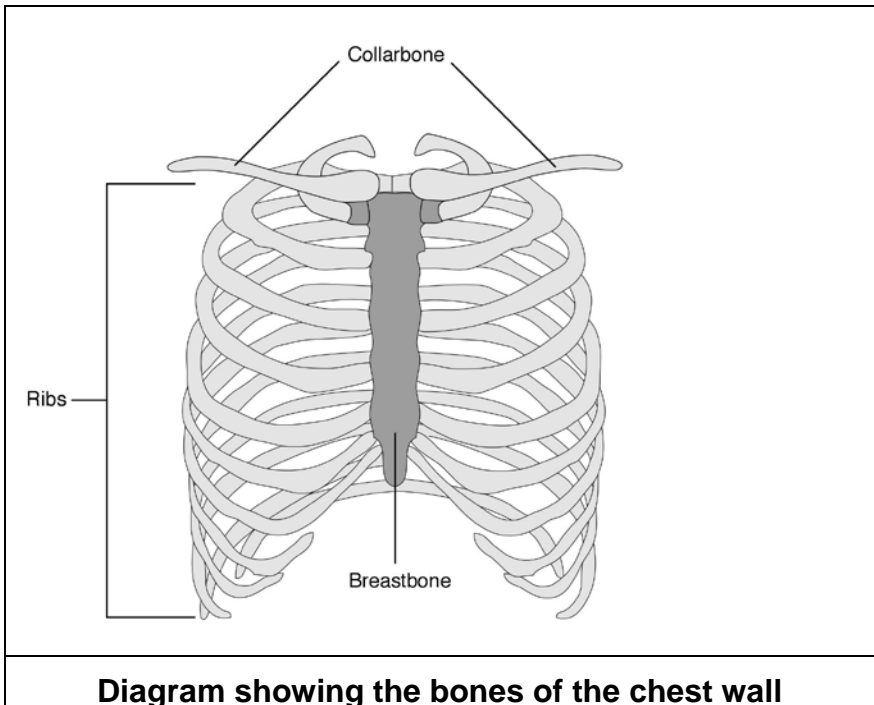
## ***What is this leaflet for?***

This leaflet has been written to give you advice after your broken (fractured) ribs, breastbone or any other injuries to the chest wall.

Rib fractures are one of the most common injuries to the chest. Common causes include road traffic accidents, sporting activities and falls.

## ***What bones are there in the chest?***

The chest comprises of the rib cage, breastbone and collarbone (see diagram below).



**Diagram showing the bones of the chest wall**

## ***What about pain relief?***

Pain is common after a chest wall injury and may be worse when you are breathing deeply, coughing or laughing.

Although uncomfortable you should be able to deep breathe and cough (see section “Recovery and advice” on pages 4 and 5).

There is no need to put up with unnecessary pain since this may slow your recovery. It may be helpful to take an extra painkiller before periods of activity that you know will cause you pain.

Up to three different painkillers might be prescribed for you to take. This is because they belong to different groups, but work well when taken together.

## ***How long will my pain last for?***

Pain may last up to 8 weeks but should gradually improve and you should be able to reduce the amount of painkiller you are taking. If you need advice about this, your GP will be able help.

### ***If you are an inpatient***

You will be given painkillers regularly while you are in hospital.

Additional painkillers will also be prescribed if needed. It is important that you think about your pain when you're going to move, not just when you are at rest.

### ***If you are an outpatient***

You will be given painkillers to take home. Please follow the instructions on the pack/bottle carefully.

#### **It is important that:**

- You take them regularly as prescribed.
- You do not run short of painkillers.
- You are able to take a deep breath and cough.
- You contact your own doctor if -
  - \* You experience new or different pain.
  - \* The painkillers are giving you side-effects (see also next section).
  - \* The painkillers are not relieving the pain.

## ***Do painkillers have any side effects?***

- Very sleepy
- Feeling sick
- Hallucinations (seeing things that are not normally there)
- Constipation

Seek advice from your GP if you experience any of the above side effects.

## ***Recovery and advice***

- Ensure your pain is well controlled so you can breathe deeply, and cough and move comfortably.
- Take regular deep breaths particularly if you can't walk about. If you can't get up and walk you should be aiming for at least 6 deep breaths every hour.
- Don't rest in bed for long periods
- If you find it painful to cough, try supporting your chest with your hands or a towel/pillow. **Do not avoid coughing.**

- Walk regularly and gradually increase your distance and pace until you are back to your normal routine.
- After your injury, avoid strenuous activities and lifting for the first 3 to 4 weeks. At first, you may need to change your activities and how you do them. Remember that heavy lifting can include things like vacuuming, carrying shopping bags, lifting toddlers etc.
- Avoid contact sports (such as rugby or hockey) until 6 weeks after your injury.

### ***Are there any problems to watch out for?***

Seek further medical advice if you have any of the following:

- Coughing up blood
- Shortness of breath
- Fever
- Increasing pain.

**This leaflet is also available in large print.**

**Other formats and languages can be supplied on request. Please call Quality Development on 01224 554149 for a copy. Ask for leaflet 1483.**

Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet. If you have any comments on how we can improve it, please call us on 01224 554149 to let us know.