

# Care after a minor chest injury

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet gives general advice to patients with any of the following chest injuries:

- A break in 1 or more of your ribs (fractured ribs or suspected fractured ribs).
- A break in your breast bone (fractured sternum).
- Bruising to your chest wall which may involve the skin, muscle or ribs (chest wall contusions).

## For the first 2 weeks:

- Use regular painkillers. Take paracetamol and/or ibuprofen regularly to make breathing and coughing easier. The clinician that saw you may have prescribed other pain medications to take as well as these.
- Keep moving around. Do not stay in bed for long amounts of time.
- If you smoke, get help to stop smoking or try to cut down. The nicotine and carbon monoxide from cigarettes can decrease oxygen levels. This can increase the risk of heart problems after injury. Smoking changes your immune system and can delay healing. This can increase the risk of infection. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/>
- Keep your shoulders moving unless told otherwise.
- You may find it helpful to sleep sitting upright for a few nights. You can use pillows to prop yourself up.
- You may feel better on some days than others, this is normal. You should allow your body to rest.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## Why did I not have a chest X-ray?

Broken ribs are difficult to see on an X-ray. Treatment for bruised and broken ribs is the same. So a chest X-ray was not needed.

## What should I avoid doing?

### Do not...

- Strap or bandage your ribs.
- Do any sport, pushing or heavy lifting for 6-8 weeks. A broken breast bone, or broken ribs take 2 to 3 months to heal properly.

## Driving

Make sure you can wear a seatbelt comfortably and take full control of the car. You must be able to make an emergency stop without lots of pain. You should not drive if the pain medication contains opioids and is making you drowsy. Please be aware the pain relief you are prescribed may contain opioids.

## Work

Depending on your job and type of injury, you may need to take some time off work while the injury heals. If you have a physical job you may need to talk with your employer to see if you can do other duties while your injury heals.

If you have any concerns about when you can return to work, it may be helpful to discuss these with your GP.

## Exercises to do

Deep breaths are an easy way to fill your lungs up with air and clear any mucus (phlegm) that builds up in your lungs.

Start in a comfortable position. Sitting upright in bed or on a chair with your shoulders relaxed is a good position.

1. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose to fill up the bottom of your lungs.
2. Hold this breath and count to 3, in your head (if you are able).
3. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth.
4. Repeat this 10 times if you can. Stop if you get dizzy.
5. Repeat every hour during the day when you are awake.

Coughing is the normal way to clear mucus (phlegm) from your lungs. Following your deep breathing, you should do a cough. This can be painful, so hold a pillow or rolled up towel on the area of your chest that hurts, to support the area and help with pain.



## When should I contact my GP or 111?

- If you become unwell with a temperature,
- If you get an uncontrollable cough,
- If you are coughing up thick, green or yellow mucus (phlegm),
- If your pain is not managed with the painkillers you are taking.

## When should I return to the Emergency Department?

- If you begin coughing up blood,
- If your breathing becomes more difficult or you get a new shortness of breath, chest pain or chest tightness,
- If you get tummy (abdominal) pain.

## Contact details

Injuries Unit, Emergency Department, Leicester Royal Infirmary

0116 258 5727

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على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
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If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net)