

Collapsed lung (pneumothorax)

Respiratory Medicine

Information for Patients

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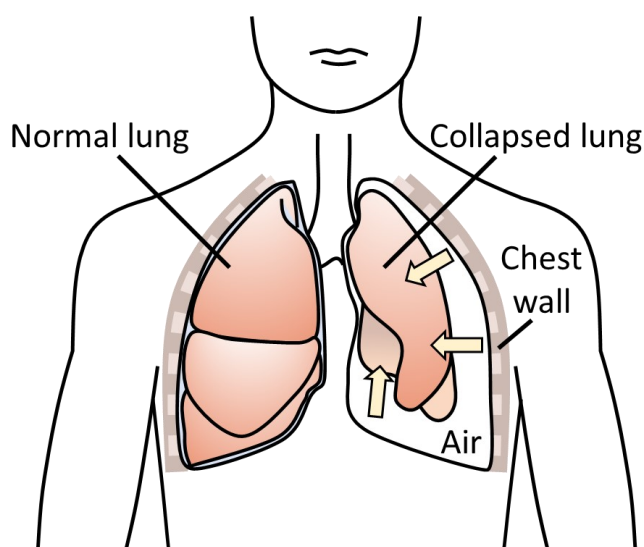
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What is a pneumothorax?

This is when air is trapped outside your lung in your chest. The air is in the space between your lung and the chest wall. There is not normally any air there. The trapped air stops your lung expanding when you breath in. A pneumothorax is also known as a collapsed lung.

How can it cause breathing problems?

As you take a breath in, your lungs expand and fill with air. When there is a pneumothorax, the trapped air pushes against the lung. It stops the lung from expanding fully and causing it to collapse. This can cause breathing problems if your lungs cannot take in enough air.



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What causes a collapsed lung?

There are 2 main ways a collapsed lung happens:

- **Primary spontaneous pneumothorax** (most common):

Air can leak from what looks like healthy lung. It then becomes trapped outside the lung. This is called a primary spontaneous pneumothorax. This can happen because of a tiny tear to an outer edge of the lung. This is often at a weakened area where the tissue has formed a small ballooning (called a bleb).

- **Secondary spontaneous pneumothorax:**

This means that there is an air leak from an existing lung disease. The lung tissues are weakened by disease. It makes it more likely to tear and let air to escape.

This can happen in conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), certain types of chest infections, diseases causing lung scarring, connective tissue diseases, or cancers affecting the lung.

A collapsed lung can also happen after an injury to the chest (called traumatic pneumothorax).

What are the symptoms of a collapsed lung?

You may notice:

- a sudden, sharp, stabbing pain in your chest.
- pain in your chest that is made worse by breathing in.
- sudden or increasing breathlessness and a fast heart rate. This depends on how much air is trapped.

How is a collapsed lung diagnosed?

Your doctor will arrange an X-ray of your chest to check for a collapsed lung. They will also look to see how much air is trapped as this can affect how it is treated.

In some cases, you may need a special scan (computed tomography (CT) scan).

We may do other tests if a lung disease is thought to be the cause.

How is a collapsed lung treated?

- **Trapped air causing a minor lung collapse does not need treatment:**

If you have a small amount of trapped air in your chest that is not causing any problems with your breathing, you do not need treatment. In most cases it may clear itself without any treatment.

We may give you an appointment at the hospital in a few weeks to check that the trapped air has cleared. We may ask you to have another X-ray.

- **Releasing the trapped air:**

The trapped air may need to be let out if it is large or causing breathing problems. Your doctor will do this by inserting a needle or a plastic tube into your chest. Sometimes, a larger chest tube (called chest drain) may be needed to drain the air away.

You may need to stay in hospital so that we can monitor your condition.

- **If the lung collapse keeps happening:**

When lung collapse is difficult to control or keeps coming back, your doctor may talk to you about fixing your lung to the chest wall. We do this through surgery or by injecting a chemical into the space between the lung and the chest wall. The surface of the lung and the chest wall are irritated during the procedure. It causes scars to form that will stick them together.

After leaving hospital, you should attend any follow-up appointments at the hospital.

What should I look out for if I'm told that I have a collapsed lung?

You should come back to hospital if:

- you are becoming more breathless.
- you have a new chest pain with your breathing.

This may mean that your collapsed lung is getting worse and you may need treatment.

Please go to your nearest Emergency department or call 999 right away if you feel that your symptoms are returning or getting worse.



What advice should I follow?

- **Work and physical activities:**

You can safely go back to work and restart your normal physical activities when your symptoms have gone. **You should not** do anything that needs extreme effort or any type of sports that has physical contact. Your doctor will let you know when you can return to them.

- **Flying and diving:**

Avoid any air travel. It can be very dangerous if you develop a collapsed lung during a flight. Your doctor will let you know when it is safe for you to air travel.

You should also **avoid diving permanently**, unless you have been advised by your doctor that it is safe to do so.

- **Stop smoking:**

You must **stop smoking** if you are a smoker. This is to reduce the chances of a lung collapse happening again.

Contact details

Please speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any question or want to talk about your care.

If you have other questions or need more information, you can contact the Pleural Diseases Specialist Nurse on 0116 258 3975.

Who can I get more help or information?

- You can find out more information about a collapsed lung (pneumothorax) online by visiting the website: www.patient.info
- The British Lung Foundation also offers support and advice to anyone affected by a lung condition. They can be contacted through their website at www.blf.org.uk or via their helpline on **03000 030 555**.

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على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

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