



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Rib injury

Issued by the walk-in services and minor injury units



This leaflet gives you advice about rib injuries.

Chest and rib injuries are usually due to a fall or blow on the chest wall. This can result in a very painful condition.

Pain may worsen after a few days or as you become more mobile. Pain may be worse when breathing in and can last up to six weeks, but will gradually improve.

If you develop any of the following symptoms you must return to the department immediately:

- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in the chest
- Cough up any blood
- Cough up any thick, green coloured mucus

Alternatives/options for treatment

X-rays do not alter the management of rib fractures. They are not routinely done unless the doctor thinks you have damaged your lung.

Pain killers

Take paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly if you are able. You can seek advice from a pharmacist.

The doctor may give you additional pain killers that you can take. You must take the painkillers regularly.

Ice packs

Ice packs help to reduce inflammation during the early stages following an injury. It cools the area down and reduces swelling.

- Use a bag of frozen peas or crushed ice cubes placed in a plastic bag.
- Protect your skin from ice burns with a damp flannel or cloth.
- Place your cold pack on top of the painful area and wrap the towel around to hold it in place. Never apply ice directly to your skin as this may cause an ice burn.
- Ice packs can be applied two to three times a day for 20 minutes, leaving two-hours between applications.

Heat packs

Alternatively heat may help to soothe pain or relieve stiffness after your injury.

Use a warm towel or hot water bottle wrapped in a towel, place on the affected area and leave for approximately ten minutes. Repeat every two hours as needed (ensure the bottle is not scalding hot). Care must be taken on areas of the body with any loss of feeling.

Deep breathing exercises

It is important to do deep breathing exercises regularly to prevent any complications occurring.

- Place your hand on the affected area
- Take a deep breath in
- Hold for ten seconds
- Blow out and cough.

Repeat ten times every hour.

Smoking

Smokers are advised to refrain from smoking. Northumbria Healthcare is a smoke free environment. Smoking is not permitted on trust premises, including the grounds of trust premises. Local stop smoking services available on:
01670 813135 for Northumberland patients and
0191 6437171 for North Tyneside patients
0300 1231044 is the national NHS Smoking Helpline number

Contact

Should you have any questions or queries please ring 0844 811 8111 and ask for one of the following:

A&E Reception, Wansbeck General Hospital
(Open from 8am to 10pm)

A&E Reception, North Tyneside General Hospital
(Open from 8am to Midnight)

A&E Reception, Hexham Children's Unit, Wansbeck
(Open from 8am to 10pm)

Alnwick Minor Injury Unit (Open 24hours)

Berwick Minor Injury Unit (Open 24 hours)

Blyth Minor Injury Unit (Open from 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

You can call NHS 111 for urgent medical advice 24/7.

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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