



## Chest Wall Injury Discharge Advice



### Cork Emergency Medicine

#### Chest injury instructions

You have either bruised or broken your ribs. If they are bruised the pain you feel when breathing, coughing or sneezing may last for up to four weeks, if broken (cracked or fractured) the pain may last for up to eight weeks.

The pain may be severe and painkillers may only be able to soothe it a little, but it is important to use them as instructed and follow the instructions below:

Attend Emergency Department if : you develop sudden shortness of breath.

Contact your GP If: If you develop a fever, cough, shortness of breath or change in your usual sputum (phlegm), as this may be due to a chest infection

While it may take time before your symptoms start to get better, if any of your symptoms (including pain) are worsen please contact your GP.

If you take any medication that thins your blood (such as warfarin), you must make an appointment to see your GP within a few days

#### To prevent problems such as chest infection it is important to:

- Take your painkillers regularly as prescribed by the doctor
- If you need to cough, support the chest with gentle pressure (using your hand, a cushion or a towel). This should make it less painful and allow you to clear your chest
- It is very important to remain mobile. Get up and move around at least once an hour
- Every hour when awake, carry out the following breathing exercise and / or use incentive spirometer as directed
- If you are a smoker try to stop smoking. This will be helpful to you in the long term. However, initially it may result in you producing more and coughing up thicker sputum
- Remember to take your painkillers regularly and support the painful area with your hand

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If you are concerned, please contact the Emergency Department you first attended:

Mercy University Hospital  
(021) 230 5011

M-UCC at  
(St. Mary's Health Campus)  
(021) 4926900

CUH  
(021) 4920200

Local Injury Unit  
Mallow General Hospital  
(022) 58506

Bantry General Hospital  
(027) 52900



## Incentive spirometry log book

How many balls should I aim to rise?	
Number of repetitions	
How often	
Prescribed by:	Date:
Designation:	

Date	Time	How many did repetitions did you do?	How many reached target?

## Advice on discharge

### Pain

It is very important to continue to take regular pain relief as prescribed. This is so you can deep breathe, cough effectively and move around whilst the injury heals. If you find that your pain medication is not working, contact your GP or speak with a pharmacist.

### Exercise and activity

Keep mobile (e.g. walking) – this is the most effective way to help you to take deep breaths and clear any phlegm. Gradually build up your level of physical activity. You may need practical help with some tasks from family and friends but aim to complete everyday activities as much as possible. To reduce the risk of developing pain or stiffness in your shoulder or spine, it is important that you continue to move around as usual and that your pain is sufficiently controlled to allow this.

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## Rest

Your body is using energy to heal itself so you may feel more tired than normal. Allow yourself rest time each day to aid your recovery. You will feel better on some days than others; this is normal. Avoid spending prolonged periods of time in bed.

## Lifting

Avoid heavy lifting, pulling or pushing for 6-8 weeks

## Sleep

You may find it helpful to sleep sitting upright for the first few nights, but this is different for each individual. The best way to achieve this, is in bed with additional pillows.

## Smoking

Smoking is best avoided; it is recognised that smokers have a higher risk of developing complications, such as chest infections, after chest wall injuries.

## Driving

Make sure you can wear a seatbelt comfortably and perform manoeuvres and an emergency stop without undue pain. You should not drive while under the influence of opioids; please be aware the pain relief you are prescribed may contain opioids. If you have any questions regarding your ability and safety to drive, please contact your GP before attempting any journey.

## Work

Depending upon your job and injury severity, you may need to take some time off work whilst the fracture heals. 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.

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

Adapted by [Dr Ben Fusco](#) from:

<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/chest-injury-advice-sheet-for-patients>

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Developed by: Dept of Emergency Medicine, Cork University Hospital

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