Chest Trauma Brochure

Points to Remember

- The words broken and fractured mean the same thing, one is not more severe than the other
- Broken chest bones can cause pain when you move, breathe and cough
- It is important to take regular pain medication
- It is advised that you avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling objects while your injuries heal

What are chest injuries?

Chest injuries usually involve the bones and/or the lungs and structures underneath. The broken bones are usually to the ribs and/or the sternum or breast bone.

You have 12 ribs on each side of your chest which wrap around to your spine. The ribs together with your breast bone protect your lungs and heart and assist you when breathing. These bones can become broken in a car accident or fall. Your ribs and breastbone can be broken in one or more places.

What problems can occur?

The most common problem you will experience is pain. You will feel pain when moving or breathing & coughing. You may also feel and hear ‘crunching or grinding’ which are the bones moving when you are breathing. This is normal.

If you cannot breathe deeply, sit out of bed or walk around due to pain in your chest, your lungs are prone to collapse and you are at risk of developing a chest infection or pneumonia. This may lengthen your stay in hospital. And make it more painful and difficult to breath.

How are injuries treated?

In most cases chest injuries heal on their own and do not need any strapping and only very occasionally in more severe cases do they need an operation.

During healing, you will need to take regular pain medication so you can breathe deeply and cough, sit out of bed and walk around. This will allow your lungs to expand and avoid infection. If pain stops you doing these activities, you may need more pain medication.

More than one type of pain medication can be taken to assist in reducing your pain. These will be prescribed as a regular dose i.e. every 8 hours with extra medication if you need it in between. If your pain is not well controlled, you may be referred to doctors and nurses who specialise in pain management (Acute Pain Service). If you are still unable to do the activities described above, please let your doctors, nurses and allied health staff members know.

Please complete these regular breathing exercises to assist in your recovery.

- Take 5 slow deep breaths in, holding for 2-3 seconds each
- Have 1 strong cough (using a folded up towel to support your fractured ribs)
Repeat 3 times every hour

**How can I prevent complications?**

You can help prevent the complications of chest injuries by doing the following:

- Take your pain medications regularly as required
- Complete your deep breathing and coughing exercises as instructed by your physiotherapist, nursing staff and medical team
- Support your chest when coughing with a rolled up towel/pillow if you need to clear phlegm/secretions from your chest. Your physiotherapist can suggest other techniques such as a ‘huff’ if you are having difficulty clearing your secretions.
- Spend as much of the day as possible sitting out of bed and going for regular walks
- Actively participate in your activities of daily living in hospital and when you go home
- Tell your nurse if you are not able to move around, take a deep breath and cough due to pain.
- Stop smoking. This will aid wound healing and the health of your lungs
- Eat a healthy diet and include protein at each meal (e.g. meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy foods, nuts, legumes) to assist with bone healing
- See your doctor (if at home) if your condition is not improving over time.

**When can I expect to begin normal activities?**

Your body will heal most broken bones in 6-8 weeks. The pain will be worst for the first 2 weeks and should improve day by day. However, sometimes the pain can last for up to six months. You should avoid pressure to your chest by not lifting heavy objects or pushing/pulling objects until you feel you can safely perform them with minimal pain.

**Who can I contact when I get home if I am not getting better?**

If you are experiencing the following symptoms you should seek help from your GP or the RMH emergency department.

- Increased pain at the site of injury
- Fever (temperature more than 37.5 C)
- Coughing up of yellow thick sputum (mucus)
- Generally feeling unwell
- Shortness of breath.

**Contact**

The nursing staff of department ____________________________

are more than happy to discuss your concerns.

Phone: (03) 9342 7000

**Practitioner / Patient notes**

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