



## **Rib Fractures**

This leaflet is designed for patients who have sustained rib fractures. It is to give you a greater understanding of your condition and advice on how to best manage your recovery. It may not answer all your questions so if you have any further concerns please do not hesitate to ask a healthcare professional.

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Fractured ribs normally occur when there is a force to the chest such as from a fall, contact sports, assault or road accident. The likelihood of fractures is more likely if there is already weakness of the bones. Fractured ribs usually take about 4-6 weeks to heal and you may still experience some discomfort after this time.

### **Pain Relief**

Injuries to the chest can be very painful. Unlike other parts of the body, it is difficult to rest your chest as you use it when you breathe and it supports your core stability. Any movement that involves rotation of your trunk is likely to result in pain.

To speed up your recovery it is essential that your pain is well controlled. You need to ensure that you take regular pain relief. If you find that the pain relief is not adequate then you must let your doctor know so that they can look at alternative pain medication.



### **Incentive Spirometer**

You may be given an incentive spirometer by a healthcare professional. This will encourage you to take deep breaths with visual feedback.

Prior to using it, make sure you are sitting up either in bed or in a chair. Use for at least 2-3 breaths per hour.

### **Breathing Exercises**

It is important after sustaining rib fractures that you are able to take deep breaths to prevent you developing a chest infection.

- Take a slow deep breath in through your nose and fill your lungs as much as you can
- Hold this breath for 3 seconds
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth
- Repeat this 3 times and then rest



Practice the breathing exercises frequently, making sure you do them at least 2-3 times per hour.

### **Supported Cough**

You may want to avoid coughing after sustaining rib fractures because of the pain but it is important to clear any phlegm. To help ease any pain, support your chest by firmly wrapping a towel or blanket around the painful area before you cough.

Alternatively you can try to clear any phlegm by performing a 'huff'. This is a forced breath out through an open mouth, as if you are steaming up a mirror.



### **Dressing**

Wear loose-fitting tops so that you do not have to twist your upper body when you put them on and take them off.



### Getting in/ out of bed

Getting in and out of bed is likely to be quite painful, especially if you attempt to roll onto your side. Over time you will develop a technique that allows you to do this by minimising the pain you experience. You may need assistance in the early stages of recovery.

### Mobility

It is important to start getting out of bed and moving around as early as possible. Initially you may require some help at first. Try to sit out in the chair for as long as you can manage. Regular short walks are best (e.g. to the toilet, to look out the window). Once you are able to walk round safely on your own you will be responsible for walking regularly and increasing your distance.

### Lifting

You should avoid lifting, pulling or pushing anything which makes the pain worse. Pain from the rib fractures will be aggravated if you do not allow the healing process to take place.

### Return to Work

When you can return to work will depend on the type of work you do and your stage of recovery. A gradual return to work may be advised, such as starting with light duties or reduced hours.

### Driving




Prior to driving make sure you can wear a seatbelt comfortably and perform manoeuvres including an emergency stop without any pain.

### Seek help from your GP or call 111 if...

1. You become more breathless or start coughing up thick green coloured phlegm
2. You start coughing up blood
3. Your pain gets worse and is not controlled with painkillers
4. You develop a high temperature

### Exercises

Complete 10 repetitions of each exercise 3-4 times a day. Only move as far as your pain allows and gradually increase the movement over time.

<p><b>1. Shoulder Squeezes</b> Squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 5 seconds then relax.</p>	
<p><b>2. Shoulder Raises</b> Raise your arms (together or separate) forwards in front of your body as high as you can</p>	
<p><b>3. Side Bends</b> In sitting or standing, gently allow your trunk to bend over to one side. Return to the start position before bending to the other side.</p>	
<p><b>4. Trunk Rotation</b> In sitting, place your arms across your chest and gently turn your body to one side. Return to the start position, then turn to the other side.</p>	