

# Minor Injuries Unit

## Chest Wall Injury Advice Sheet



This leaflet provided information for patients with any of the following:

- Fractured ribs (broken ribs).
- Sprained inter-costal muscles.
- Fractured sternum (breast bone).
- Chest wall bruising.

Injuries of the chest wall can be very painful. Unlike other parts of the body it is difficult to rest your chest as it constantly moves when you breathe in and out.

Chest wall injuries often take several weeks to get better. As a rough guide, broken ribs and sternums take roughly 4 – 6 weeks to heal, and it is normal to feel discomfort after this time.

Bruising can take 3-4 weeks to heal.

Deep breathing and coughing may be painful, however it is important not to avoid this as this can lead to trapped sputum (phlegm) in your lungs, which can lead to infection. This risk is higher in those who smoke and have chronic chest conditions such as COPD or heart failure. Seek help to stop smoking if appropriate.

It is rarely necessary to x-ray the chest as the treatment for both broken ribs and bruised ribs is the same.

- Take regular pain relief, either prescribed or over the counter (always read the label). This will make it easier to move, breathe deeply and cough.
- Take 10 deep breaths every hour.
- It is important to cough if you need to do so. It may be more comfortable to support the injured area with your hand or a pillow.
- Alternate rest with activity, keeping on the move will assist in the drainage of normal lung secretions.
- Return to work as you feel able. You can be guided by your GP if necessary.

## **You should not:**

- Lift heavy items.
- Stay in bed
- Take cough linctus as this may suppress coughing.

# Exercises:



Rotation – when seated gently rotate your upper body from side to side. Do this hourly and as many times as you are able.



In standing or sitting, gently squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 1 -2 seconds feeling a stretch across your chest. Repeat hourly as many times as you are able.



Twice a day you should breathe deeply then force the breath out making a 'huffing' sound. This will help to clear any secretions.

Attend your nearest Emergency Department if:

- You become acutely short of breath.
- Begin to cough up blood.
- Develop severe chest or abdominal pain.

Attend you GP / call 111 if:

- You start to cough up green/yellow phlegm.
- You become unwell with a temperature.

# Useful Information and contacts:



NHS Forth Valley website has lots of useful information and contacts:  
[www.nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/know-who-to-turn-to-when-you-are-ill](http://www.nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/know-who-to-turn-to-when-you-are-ill)

GP contact details can be found at [www.nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/local-service-finder/](http://www.nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/local-service-finder/) or by calling NHS 24 on 111.

NHS Inform provides health information and details of services and support in your area. Call free on 0800 224488 or visit [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)



For people with mental health or psychological problems and in crisis, support is available by phoning NHS 24 on 111, Samaritans on 116 123 or Breathing Space on 0800 83 85 87.



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### **Smoking is not permitted anywhere on our hospital grounds!**

It is now an offence to smoke **within 15 metres** of a hospital building. This can result in a fixed penalty notice of £50 or a fine of up to £1,000.

### **If you can't go let us know!**

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times. So, if you are unable to attend or no longer require your hospital appointment, **please let us know** so we can offer it to someone else.