

Patient Information

## Physiotherapy

# Thoracic trauma

You have been given this information because you have been diagnosed with broken ribs. Your rib fractures should heal themselves over the next 2 to 3 months. You may experience pain, and this pain could increase over the first few days after your injury.

### **The importance of deep breathing exercises and coughing with broken ribs**

Pain caused by trauma to the thoracic cage, may lead to further complications with your lungs.

Your breathing may be shallow, and your cough may be weak. This can cause phlegm to build up in the lungs. This can lead to a chest infection or pneumonia.

You will be advised to do deep breathing exercises (see below) by a member of the Physiotherapy team. Please do these exercises regularly. They will minimise the risk of you getting a chest infection or pneumonia.

Complete these exercises throughout your hospital stay. We suggest completing them every hour that you are awake.

Do these exercises in the positions taught to you by your physiotherapist or nurse. This will usually be sitting upright if you are able.



## Patient Information

### **Breathing exercises**

1. Take 6 slow deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose, fully drawing air to the bottom of your lungs, and breathe out through your mouth.
2. Hold each breath for 3 to 5 seconds before breathing out.
3. Cough strongly from your stomach, using the technique taught to you by the physiotherapist/nurse.
4. You may or may not cough up some phlegm. If you do cough up phlegm, or you feel like there is phlegm that needs clearing, repeat these steps until you are not coughing up any phlegm, or you feel like it is gone.
5. Repeat these steps every hour.

### **Pain**

If pain is preventing your ability to perform these exercises regularly, please inform your nurse so that you can receive the right amount and type of pain relief to help with this.

### **Walking**

Once appropriate, the physiotherapists/nurses will help you to sit out in a chair and to walk on the ward. This could be on the day of your admission.

You may have oxygen, drips, and drains attached. This should not stop you getting out of bed, but you may require some support from the ward staff due to these attachments.

Once the physiotherapists/nurses have assessed your ability to sit out in a chair and walk on the ward by yourself, you should aim to sit out at regular intervals and to complete regular walks on the ward throughout the day. Gradually increase the distance of the walks as you are able to.

If you have a drain attached to you that is attached to the wall, you may not be able to walk away from your bedspace. If this is the case, walking on the spot is a suitable alternative until you are able to walk away from your bedspace.

## Patient Information

If you have any concerns or queries regarding your exercises, please speak to your physiotherapist/nurse.

### Shoulder exercises

It is important to exercise the shoulder on the same side as your rib fracture(s). Your shoulder can become stiff as you will probably be trying to protect your injured rib. This may be limiting the movement of your arm on this side.

Gentle exercises for the shoulder should not increase your rib pain and will help to prevent problems developing at your shoulder joint.

Only complete these exercises if your physiotherapist advises you to do so. You may have other injuries that interfere with these exercises.

Perform the following movements, making sure that you move your arm within a pain free range of movement:

With each exercise, stand and bent at the waist, holding onto a stable surface with your unaffected arm, lean slightly forwards so that your affected arm is hanging down and completely relaxed. Then, allow your arm to move in the following ways:

1. Forwards and backwards
2. Clockwise/anticlockwise
3. Side to side

Repeat each movement 10 to 15 times, 2 to 3 times a day.



## Patient Information

### **Self-management**

This leaflet is designed to assist you in the self-management of your injury/condition.

Therefore, once your therapist has gone through your breathing exercises and shoulder exercises, it is essential that you continue them on your own to optimise your recovery.

### **Exercising post rib fractures:**

Your pain level will guide the amount of exercise and physical activity your fractured rib can withstand. A gradual increase in your exercise is recommended over the first few months of recovery.

If you experience any on-going challenges once you are discharged from the hospital, contact your GP. These challenges may include:

- Fever
- Worsening shortness of breath
- Cough or increase in mucus that you cough up, especially if bloody.
- Pain that does not allow deep breathing or coughing despite taking pain relief

### **Returning to work**

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 your return to work, you should speak to a member of the medical team during your hospital stay.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please ask or contact 0247 696 5638 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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