

Fractured (Broken) Ribs

Rib fractures are a common chest injury. They are usually the result of direct impact or trauma. X-rays may not always show the broken rib but are useful to check for underlying lung injury.

What should I expect?

It is common to have pain on deep breathing, coughing, movement and touch. Your pain may get worse over the first week and last for up to 8 weeks.

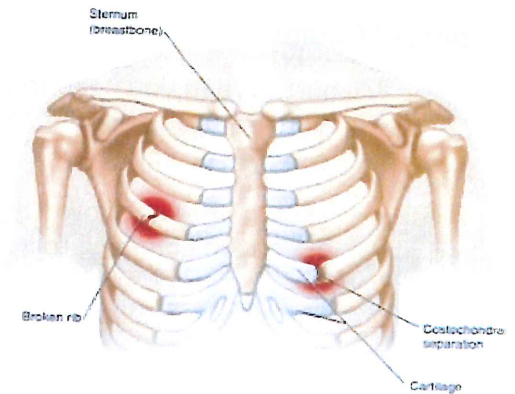


Image source <https://www.sportsmd.com/>

What can I do to help myself?

You can help prevent lung problems by doing the exercises on this fact sheet. You are a higher risk of a getting a chest infection if you:

- Are older
- Smoke
- Have pre-existing lung disease
- Have multiple rib fractures

Take your pain relief medications as recommended by your doctor. Breathing exercises will not be effective unless your pain is controlled.

What should I avoid?

Avoid strenuous activities for the first 3 – 4 weeks, then gradually increase physical activity as pain allows.

Avoid contact sports for at least 6 weeks unless otherwise advised by your doctor or physiotherapist.

When should I seek help?

Contact your General Practitioner (GP) or local hospital immediately if:

- You are too short of breath to move
- You develop a fever
- Your phlegm is thick, green/yellow/brown or blood specked (which is not usual for you)
- Your pain is stopping you from walking or deep breathing

In a medical emergency call 000 or go to your nearest emergency department.

How do I find comfort?

Supported Cough

Coughing will hurt. When you need to cough, it is best to ensure you are sitting upright and take a deep breath in before you cough.

Try holding a cushion or folded towel against the injured rib when you are coughing to help support the painful area.



Huff Technique

Try huffing instead of coughing to reduce pain.

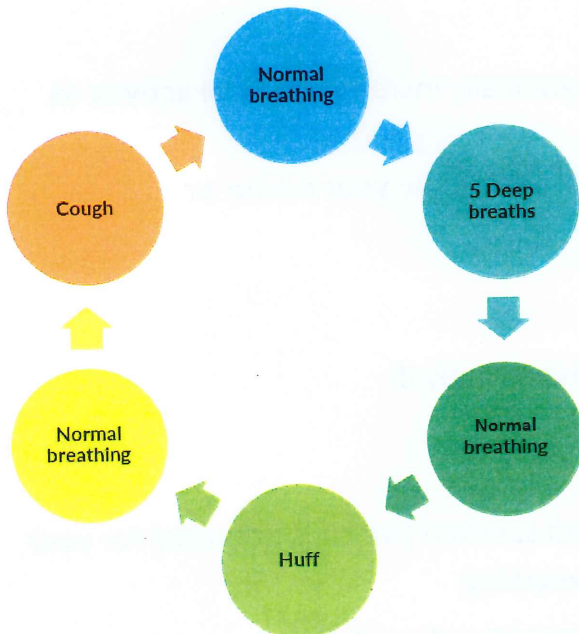
To huff, take a deep breath in and then force air out with an 'O' shaped mouth - like you are fogging up glasses or a mirror.



What exercises should I do?

This breathing cycle helps to get air into the lungs and clear phlegm. You can start this immediately.

It is recommended to do this 3 times a day while you have pain with normal breathing.



It is important for your recovery to sit out of bed and keep moving as much as you feel comfortable.

Aim to walk around for a few minutes, every hour when you are awake.

This will decrease your risk of developing lung problems.

