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Customer Services Department

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Contact details

The Minor Injuries Units are open every day of the year, including Bank Holidays.

Minor Injuries Unit Cumberland Centre

Damerel Close
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PL1 4JZ

Tel: 01752 434390

Opening times: 8:30am - 9pm

Minor Injuries Unit South Hams Hospital

Plymouth Road
Kingsbridge
TQ7 1AT

Tel: 01548 852349

Opening times: 9am - 5pm

Minor Injuries Unit Tavistock Hospital

Spring Hill
Tavistock
PL19 8LD

Tel: 01822 612233

Opening times: 8am - 10pm

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Livewell Southwest



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Information & Advice

Chest Wall Injury

Minor Injuries Unit

Cumberland Centre
South Hams Hospital
Tavistock Hospital

Introduction

You have been examined by the Nurse Practitioner and diagnosed with a chest wall injury. For your return home there are some important points to remember.

This leaflet provides advice and guidance for patients with simple fractured rib and chest wall bruising.

What are the causes of chest wall injuries?

Your chest wall contains 12 ribs on each side which connect to your spine at the back to your sternum at the front. Between each rib is a layer of muscle. Injury to your chest wall is either bruising of the muscles or a fracture (break) in one or more of your ribs which will cause pain.

Pain

Injuries to the chest wall are very painful. Normally your chest wall moves every time you breathe in. You also take deep breaths and cough in order to clear secretions from your lungs. If you do not breathe deeply or cough because you are in pain, you will be more prone to getting a chest infection.

Chest wall injuries normally take weeks to get better. As a simple guide, a patient with one broken or bruised rib can expect to be in pain for three weeks or more. You may also be in discomfort for several more weeks, especially if more than one rib is involved.

Pain management

Take regular simple analgesia such as Paracetamol, Co-codamol and / or Ibuprofen which can be bought over the counter. You may need to see your own doctor for stronger analgesia if these are not sufficient to control the pain.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for chest wall injuries and it is not always necessary to x-ray the chest. If the Nurse Practitioner considers you to have had a significant chest wall injury requiring an x-ray they would have referred you to the Emergency Department.

The main complication of chest wall injuries is breathing: pain from either fracture or bruising can use respiratory splinting (where pain stops you from breathing as deeply as normal) and stagnation of the normal lung secretions can lead to lung infection. This risk is higher in those who smoke and have lung disease.

To prevent infection you must:

- Do regular deep breathing exercises - e.g. take ten very deep breaths every hour. Do these in whatever position is most comfortable for you. Breathe through your nose which will warm, filter and humidify the air. Sigh it out through your mouth.
- Try to sit and sleep upright as much as possible and support yourself with pillows.

- If you feel the need to cough, do not try to suppress it as it is important to clear the sputum in order that it does not collect and cause infection. Again, holding a pillow may help.
- Do take regular analgesia.
- Do not take cough medicine.

What should I look out for?

You may have pain for several weeks but this should gradually improve over time. If not, please see your doctor.

Seek further advice if you experience any of the following:

- You become short of breath
- Your sputum becomes discoloured or more productive
- You become unwell with a temperature