



You came to the emergency department with a chest injury. The doctor thinks you have one or more bruised or broken ribs, and that you are safe to recover at home.

What is it?

Broken or bruised ribs are painful, especially when you breathe deeply, cough or move. They heal by themselves, usually over 4 to 6 weeks. The main danger is a chest infection: if pain stops you breathing deeply and coughing, mucus collects in the lungs. Good pain relief and breathing exercises help prevent this.

Looking after yourself at home

- Every hour while awake, take 5 slow, deep breaths, then give one strong cough.
- When you cough, hold a folded towel or pillow firmly against the sore ribs.
- Keep moving around the house. Do not stay in bed all day.
- Do not strap or bandage your chest. This stops your lungs from filling properly.
- Sleeping propped up on pillows may be more comfortable.
- Avoid heavy lifting, contact sport and smoking until the ribs have healed.

Medicines

- Take paracetamol regularly, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may help too, unless your doctor said no. Avoid it if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or are pregnant.
- If you were given a stronger pain medicine, it can make you drowsy and constipated. Use it only as prescribed.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre within a week, or sooner if the pain stops you breathing deeply.
- People who are older, smoke, or have lung disease should see their doctor within 2 to 3 days.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Breathing that is getting harder, or you are short of breath at rest
- Coughing up blood
- Fever, with a cough bringing up yellow, green or brown mucus
- Sudden new or much worse chest pain
- New pain in your tummy or the tip of your shoulder
- Feeling faint, dizzy or confused



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

EM Orbit · Emergency medicine, in one orbit · rib-fracture-en