

Caring for your chest injury

Name:

ACC claim number:

Contacting ACC: Call 0800 101 996 or Recovery Team
member number (if known):

Next booked follow up appointment (if known): / / with

About your injury

Your rib cage is part of your respiratory (breathing) system and is always moving as you breathe in and out. When you have a chest injury, it may include damage to your ribs, heart, lungs, blood vessels, muscles and/ or nerves. It is possible to break more than one rib at a time. A rib can also break in more than one place.

If you injured a bone in your arm or leg, you would normally have a cast around it to keep it still, relieve pain and allow the bone to heal. It isn't possible to use a cast for injuries to your chest. This means it is common to have pain and discomfort during your stay in

hospital and for several weeks after you are discharged.

However, the pain will ease steadily as your injury heals.

Pain relief

A chest injury is painful. Pain relief is the most effective and most important way of treating it. Take your pain relief regularly at the times the label states, not just when your pain is bad.

Aim to stay on top of your pain so that you continue to be comfortable. That is a better way of managing pain than waiting until you get sore and then trying to get comfortable again.

With enough pain relief you should be able to:

- breathe deeply
- cough
- move comfortably throughout your house to do your normal, everyday activities.

Deep breathing, coughing and moving around all help to prevent chest infections. If you cannot do these things, you need to see a health professional to improve your pain management.

As you get better, you will need less pain relief. A health professional can help you to get the right amount of pain relief for as long as you need it.

Pain relief medications can have side effects such as feeling sick, having difficulty going to the toilet and feeling confused.

Please contact a health professional if you get any of these symptoms.

Managing your day

When you have a chest injury, it is very important to stay active so you don't get chest infections, become too weak or lose fitness. How soon and how well you get moving again depends on your level of pain and nausea and whether you have other injuries.

It is normal to feel tired when you get home from hospital. Plan rest times during the day to give yourself a break. Try to stay out of bed during the day and aim to do your normal, everyday activities as much as possible (eg, walking, or making drinks or food).

You need to work out a comfortable sleeping position. It is normal to find it painful to lie flat for the first couple of weeks after your injury. You may need to use extra pillows to sleep upright or to support your arms for comfort when sleeping. At first, you may even find it easier to sleep in a reclining, supportive chair.

Returning to work

If your injury has stopped you from working, the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) may fund weekly payments from seven days after your injury (once it accepts your claim). This means for the first seven days, you will need to take sick or annual leave in order to receive your pay. After that, ACC may pay up to 80% of your income while you recover to a maximum salary amount.

Weekly compensation can be applied for via the MyACC portal at www.acc.co.nz or by contacting ACC and providing your ACC claim number (given at the top of this page and on any ACC paperwork).

When you can return to work depends on the type of work you do, how good your pain control is and what type of medication you are still taking (as you can't drive with some medications).

Discuss time needed off work with a health professional and make a plan for returning.

ACC may also be able to help with costs for travelling to get treatment or rehabilitation. Contact ACC to learn more about what support may be available.

Tips to help your recovery

- Avoid heavy lifting, pulling and pushing. When you are carrying things (eg, laundry or shopping), hold them close to your body.
- To get up off a chair or toilet, you may find it more comfortable to avoid bending forward when standing. If you are struggling to get into a standing position, ACC may be able to provide you with aids to make it easier.
- Getting out of bed can be hard. Try rolling onto your uninjured side first (if you have one). It's usually easier to use that arm to push up into sitting, as long as you don't have arm injuries that stop you from doing so.
- Avoid driving until you can comfortably and safely stop the car suddenly. Some medications will also prevent you from driving – discuss this with your doctor. Check your insurance policy to find out if it sets any conditions on driving that might affect you.
- You may find it more comfortable to dress while seated. Place your foot on your opposite leg or another raised surface to help you put on shoes and socks.
- Sometimes pain relief medications can give you constipation. Drinking plenty of water and eating high-

roughage foods (eg, kiwifruit, prunes) can help prevent this.

- Contact sports can increase your pain and cause more injury. Do not play contact sports for at least six weeks. Your doctor can tell you when it is safe to play again.
- Smoking can increase your risk of getting a chest infection. Seek help if you want to quit or call Quitline on 0800 778 778.

When to seek help:

From a physiotherapist

If your breathing remains painful or you are struggling to move around comfortably, you can get help from a local physiotherapy clinic. Contact them directly and give them your ACC number.

ACC can help pay for some of the cost of this treatment.

(Before the treatment starts, the clinic will tell you if you need to pay a small surcharge.)

From a doctor or nurse (eg, your GP, practice nurse, Urgent Care or through a telehealth service)

Contact them:

- if you get a fever, are coughing up yellow or green phlegm (pronounced 'flem'), you have difficulty breathing or more pain on breathing, or swelling occurs in your chest area
- if you need help increasing or reducing your pain medication, or to get help managing side effects
- if you need more time off work due to your injury or need support returning to your job (eg, light duties). Doctors or nurse practitioners can write medical notes for this.
- to check when it is safe for you to drive, fly and play contact sports.

In an emergency

If you suddenly become short of breath, start coughing up blood, or get severe chest wall swelling or more pain: go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department or dial 111 for an ambulance.