

## Broken Ribs

Broken ribs are usually caused by having a fall or being hit by something. Broken ribs are painful but not serious. However, the problems they can cause can be serious.

If you break your:

- sternum (breastbone), you may bruise your heart
- first or second rib(s) (you start counting from under your shoulder down), you may hurt one of the big blood vessels that carry blood to and from your heart
- lower ribs (seven to 12), you may hurt your liver and/or spleen
- several ribs, you may hurt your lungs causing them to collapse

You should see your doctor if you think you have broken your ribs. Your doctor can ensure that nothing more serious has happened.

### What are the signs of broken ribs?

- history of a fall or being hit
- pain in your rib area that is worse when you move
- it hurts when you push on your ribs
- you hear a crackle where it hurts
- you have a hard time to take a deep breath or breathe well

### What can I do at home?

It takes time for broken ribs to get better (four to six weeks usually). During the first few days you should:

- Try to do deep breathing exercises by using a pillow to support your chest. Hug the pillow into your chest, then take a few deep breaths. The pillow will help to decrease the pain. If you cannot do these you may have breathing problems like pneumonia.
- You can put ice on the hurt area for 30 minutes three or four times a day for the first 72 hours.
- You may find it more comfortable to sleep sitting up, like in a recliner chair, for the first few days.
- You may take acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen, unless there is a reason you cannot such as an allergy or you are on blood thinners. If you are unsure, you should check with your doctor or pharmacist.

### Go to the emergency department or see your doctor if:

- you have chest pain
- you have a hard time breathing or feel short of breath