

Rib Fracture: Home Care Sheet

A printable home care sheet for broken or bruised ribs - pain control, breathing exercises, sleep positions and when to get urgent care.

At a Glance

- Ribs usually heal in about 2-6 weeks
- Pain control is the priority - it lets you breathe deeply and prevents chest infection
- Breathe deeply regularly, several times an hour
- Expect pain with coughing, twisting and lying on that side for a few weeks

Your Daily Care

Pain relief:

- Take pain relief as directed - paracetamol or ibuprofen-based options are commonly used
- Hold a pillow against the ribs when coughing or sneezing
- Sleep propped up if lying flat is uncomfortable

Breathing (the most important part):

1. Several times an hour, take 3-5 slow deep breaths.
2. If you can, follow with a gentle cough - it keeps the lungs clear.
3. Walk a little each day within comfort.

Activity:

- Return to light daily activity as pain allows
- Avoid heavy lifting, twisting and contact sport for the first 4-6 weeks
- Use pain as your guide - stop what makes pain sharp

Do This

- Keep pain controlled so you breathe and move
- Do the breathing exercises every hour
- Move gently and walk daily

Avoid This

- Shallow breathing because it hurts
- Smoking, which slows healing
- Heavy lifting and contact sport too early
- Taping or tightly strapping the ribs

When to See Someone Urgently

Go back to urgent care for increasing shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, coughing blood, fever, or severe pain that is not controlled. Chest pain that feels heavy or spreads to the arm or jaw is urgent regardless of the injury.

References

1. NHS. "Broken or bruised ribs." <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-or-bruised-ribs/>
2. StatPearls. "Rib Fractures." <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29262129/>

***This information is for education only and is not a medical diagnosis.** InjuryAtlas does not replace an assessment by a qualified health professional. If you have severe pain, visible deformity, numbness, loss of function, or symptoms that are getting worse, seek medical care promptly.*