

# Rib Injury

## **What is a rib injury?**

There are 12 ribs on each side of the chest that protect the heart, lungs, and the upper abdominal contents. All of the ribs are attached to the vertebrae (backbone) in the rear. In the front, 10 of them are attached to the sternum (breastbone) by pieces of cartilage. Direct blows to the ribs may bruise or break the ribs or injure to the rib cartilage. The ribs may tear away from the cartilage that attaches them to the breastbone. This tearing away from the cartilage is called a costochondral separation.

## **How does it occur?**

Rib injuries usually result from a direct blow to the chest wall. Breaks usually occur in the curved portion of the outer part of the rib cage. A costochondral separation may occur when you land hard on your feet or even when you cough or sneeze violently.

## **What are the symptoms?**

A rib injury causes pain and tenderness over the place of injury. You may have pain when you breathe, move, laugh, or cough.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your doctor will review your symptoms, examine your rib cage, and listen to your lungs.

Your doctor may order a chest x-ray to look for any rib damage, lung damage, or bleeding around the lungs.

## **How is it treated?**

Treatment may include:

- rest
- putting an ice pack over the injured rib for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away
- taking an anti-inflammatory or other pain medication.

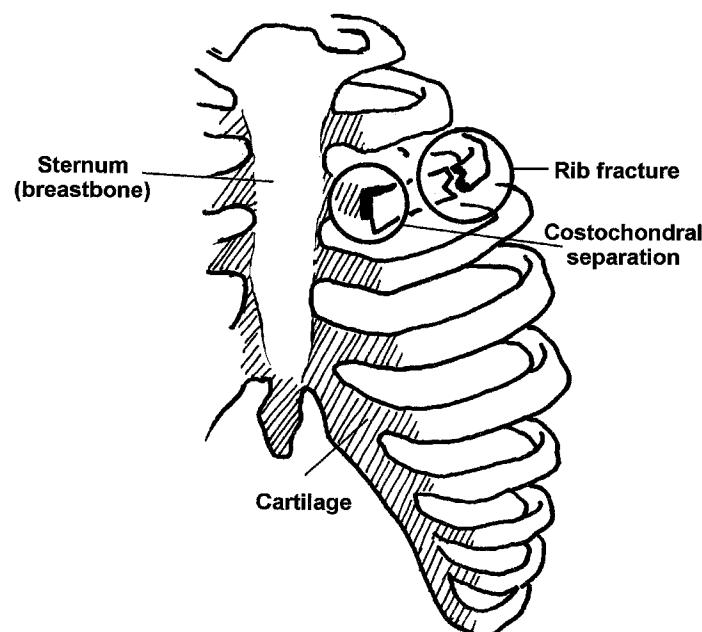
## **When can I return to my sport or activity?**

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely

possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon your ribs recover, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

If you broke a rib it may take 4 to 6 weeks to heal. Your doctor may take an x-ray to see that the bone has healed before he or she allows you to return to your activity, especially if it is a contact sport. You may

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participate in noncontact activities sooner if you can do so without pain in your ribs and without pain when you breathe. If you have bruised your ribs or separated the cartilage from the ribs, you may

return to your activity when you can do so without pain.

### ***How can I prevent a rib injury?***

Ribs are often injured in accidents that are not preventable.

However, in contact sports such as football it is important to wear appropriate protective equipment.