

Breathing Exercises: Active Cycle of Breathing

Technique:

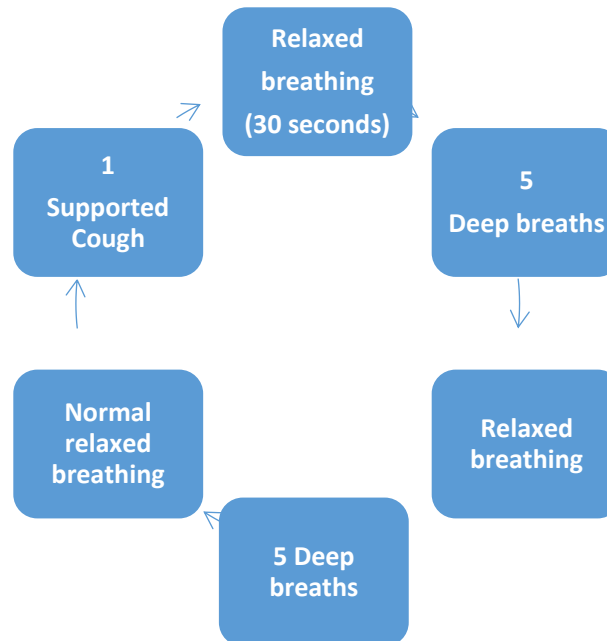
You are at high risk of chest infections after a chest injury. It is vital that you complete these breathing exercises every hour while the pain is still present, to try to avoid developing an infection.

The best position is to complete these in sitting, however can be completed in a position that is comfortable to you.

Take appropriate pain relief prior to completing in order for them to be as comfortable as possible

Complete these exercises at least 4 times a day, however if you are struggling to clear phlegm off your chest then please complete more regularly e.g. every hour or as required

1. **Relaxed Breathing:** normal slow relax breathing using the lower chest with relaxation of upper chest and shoulders
2. **Deep breathing:** slow deep breaths in through the nose filling all of your lungs, and slowly breathing out through the mouth. You can hold for 5-10 seconds at the top of the breath
3. **Supported cough:** Hold a pillow or rolled up towel over the injured area and cough to provide support and limit pain.



CHEST INJURY

DISCHARGE INFORMATION



(Please tick as appropriate)

- ☐ **Rib Fractures** – a break in the rib bone / bones
- ☐ **Flail Chest** – Defined as at least two fractures per rib, in at least two ribs
- ☐ **Sternum Fracture** – A break to your breast bone, located in the centre of the chest
- ☐ **Pneumothorax** – A collection of air between the lung and lung wall causing part of or the whole lung to collapse
- ☐ **Haemothorax** – A collection of blood in the lung.
- ☐ **Lung contusion** – Bruising or bleeding of the lung tissue that may cause pain when breathing

Background

Chest injuries can be very painful, and the amount of pain you feel and how long it may last will depend on the type of injury you have.

As a rough guide, fractured ribs and sternums take 4-6 weeks to heal, but it's usual to feel some discomfort after this.

Bruising can take between 2-6 weeks to heal. It is difficult to rest your chest like you can with other areas of your body, as you need to continue to breathe, and you use it to support sitting and lying down.

RETURNING TO WORK

Your return to work will depend on the type of work you do and your employer. It may be possible to discuss a phased return to work or a temporary change of duties. If you require a sick note from work this can be gained from your GP.

RETURNING TO DRIVING

You must be able to safely perform an emergency stop or manoeuvre. You should always be in control of your vehicle. You should contact your insurance provider before driving. Your injury may affect your vehicle insurance.

Further Help

Local Pharmacy – Your local pharmacy can advise on pain relief.

General Practitioner – can provide you with a sick note if you are unable to work. Your GP can also support you with analgesia post discharge.

Emergency Department – Should you have a sudden increase in shortness of breath, any difficulty in breathing or worsening chest pain despite analgesia then help can be sought via your local Emergency Department

111 – Can help direct you to the best place to get help for your symptoms.

Major Trauma Service – can help with any questions you have about your injuries and recovery.

Mon-Fri 08:30 – 16:00

01267 229 779

Majortrauma.hdd@wales.nhs.uk

This leaflet was produced as a collaboration between : Hywel Dda Pain Service, Respiratory physio team & Major Trauma Service.

Leaflet Review: April 2027

DOs

Take regular pain relief. This helps you feel able to take deep breath and cough.

Keep mobile (e.g Walking). This is the most effective way to help you deep breath and clear any sputum.

Cough when you need to and support your chest.

Seek help with stopping smoking
Be aware of any changes in your symptoms and signs of complications.

DON'T

Stay lying down for long periods

Lift, pull or push anything that makes the pain worse

Return to contact sports for at least 6 weeks after your injury

Please seek urgent medical attention if you have;

A sudden increase in shortness of breath / difficulty in breathing.

Worsening chest pain despite analgesia

Any blood on coughing