

Managing chest pain caused by inflamed joints in your rib cage (costochondritis)

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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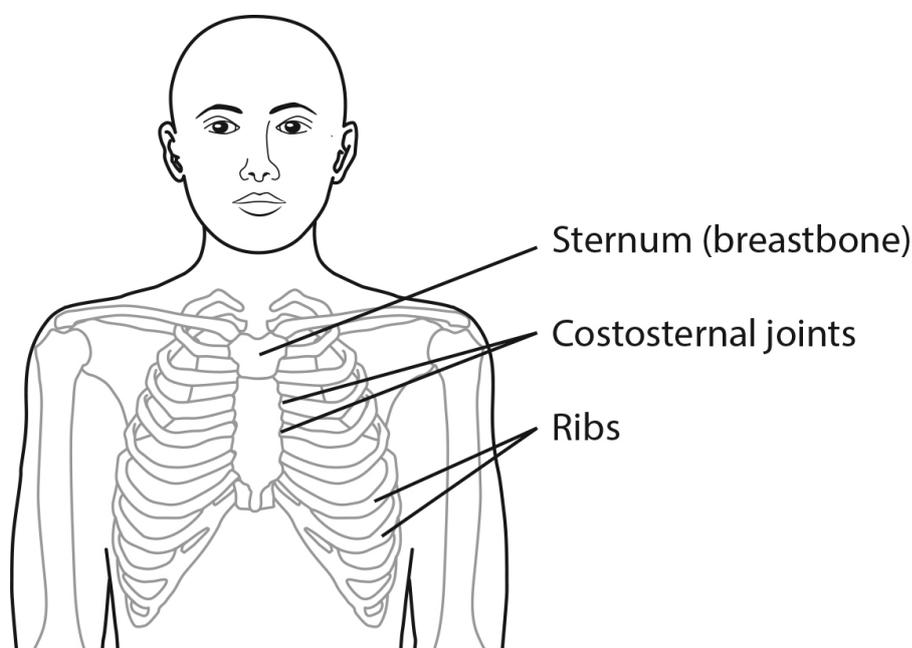
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Introduction

Costochondritis is a condition that causes pain and tenderness in your chest.

The pain occurs when there is inflammation of the tissue (cartilage) that joins your ribs to the breastbone, known as the costosternal joints. Costochondritis does not lead to any permanent problems but it can be common for it to happen again.



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What causes costochondritis?

Its not known exactly why people develop costochondritis but in some cases it may be caused by:

- severe coughing and sneezing, which strains your chest area.
- an injury to your chest.
- physical strain from exercise or sudden exertion while lifting heavy objects.
- wear and tear—your chest moves in and out 20 to 30 times a minute and over time this motion can lead to discomfort in these joints.

What are the common symptoms of costochondritis?

- Pain and tenderness in your chest, which could be sharp or dull
- Pain may develop slowly or suddenly
- Pain when you cough or sneeze
- Pain when you take a deep breath

How do I know I have costochondritis?

- There is no test for costochondritis. The doctor should be able to tell if you have it from your symptoms and by examining you.
- Your doctor may do a few other tests to ensure that you do not have a different problem.

Treatment

Costochondritis may resolve on its own after a few weeks, but, it can last for several months.

Any activity that makes the pain in your chest area worse should be avoided until you feel better.

Stretching exercises may help.

The 'Doorway Pectoral (chest) Stretch' may be useful. To do this:

- Stand facing an open doorway
- Raise your arms with your elbows bent 90 degrees
- Rest your forearm against the walls on either side of the doorway with your elbows at shoulder height
- Lean forward to gently stretch your chest muscles.

More exercises can be found at:

<https://costochondritis.com/stretches-for-costochondritis/>



You may also find it soothing to regularly apply warmth to the painful area a few times a day, such as a warm hot water bottle.

You can take over the counter pain relieving tablets such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease the pain.

Costochondritis usually settles by itself after a few weeks but sometimes it can last a few months.

Useful additional reading resources:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/costochondritis/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chest-pain/>

Contact details:

If the symptoms do not settle down after 6 weeks, you should see your GP.

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