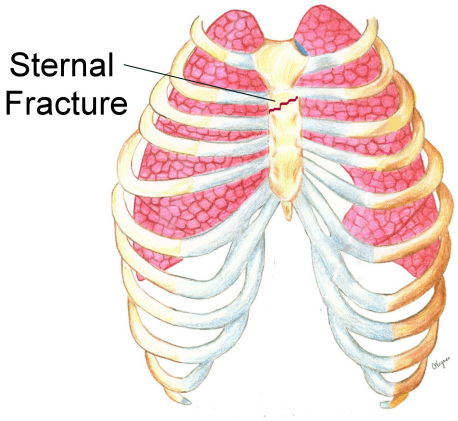
Fractured Sternum

A fractured breastbone *(sternum)* can happen from a blow to the front of the chest. **Sternal fractures usually take 6–12 weeks to heal**. Depending upon the cause of the injury, some sternal fractures are also associated with injuries to the heart, lungs, ribs and abdomen. Hospital care may be needed to evaluate or treat other internal injuries.



Treatment for a sternal fracture includes bed rest for 2–3 days, and then activity should be gradually increased as tolerated. Ice packs placed over the injury for 20–30 minutes every 3–4 hours for the first 2–3 days will help reduce pain and swelling. Deep breathing or coughing every hour can help keep the lungs clear. Pain or anti-inflammatory medicines may be prescribed to reduce the discomfort.

This is a potentially dangerous condition. Internal bruising of the heart, lungs or abdominal organs can cause life-threatening complications.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You or your child develops shortness of breath or begins coughing up blood.
- The pain spreads into the arms, neck, back or belly.
- You or your child develops abdominal pain, vomiting, severe weakness or fainting.
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- You or your child develops an irregular heartbeat or palpitations.
- There are any other concerns related to the injury.
- There is increasing pain that is unresponsive to the prescribed medications.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 01/25/2006 Document Re-Released: 01/09/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.