

# Costochondritis (rib pain)

Costochondritis is inflammation of the rib cage cartilage and muscle at the front of the chest wall. Costochondritis is one of the more common causes of breast pain from the chest wall and settles with simple measures.

## Causes

The cause is largely unknown, although coughing, some activities and physical trauma may trigger the condition. It can affect anyone although women seem to be affected more than men. People with fibromyalgia can develop the condition more often.

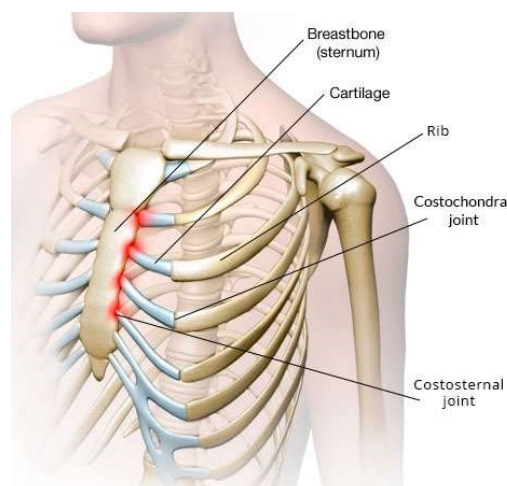
## Signs and symptoms

When the costochondral joints become inflamed, it can result in:

- Sharp chest pain in the front of the chest, close to where your breastbone and ribs meet, typically on the left side. It may spread to your back or belly. Sometimes the pain is aching and dull.
- Pain when you take a deep breath or cough. It gets better when you stop moving or your breathing is quieter.
- Tenderness when you press on your rib joints. If you do not have this, you probably do not have costochondritis.

The most common sites of pain are close to the breastbone (sternum), and the costochondral junctions at the level of the 4th, 5th and 6th ribs.

Most cases of costochondritis are mild and often settle quickly within 1-2 months. Occasionally it can last longer or return.



## Self-help for costochondritis

- Costochondritis is often made worse by any activity that places stress on your chest area, such as strenuous exercise, stretching movements, lying on the affected area or wearing a seatbelt.
- Avoid activity that makes the pain in your chest worse until the inflammation in your ribs and cartilage has improved.
- You may find it soothing to apply heat regularly to the painful area, using warm flannels or heat pads.
- Smoking can make the inflammation worse, so you may find the pain lessens if you cut down or stop altogether.
- Sleep in a lightweight bra at night to support your breasts.

## Treatments

- Painkillers, such as paracetamol - may be used for mild to moderate pain.
- Taking a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory, such as a short course of regular ibuprofen, this can help control pain and swelling.

**These medicines are available from pharmacies, but you should make sure you read the instructions that come with them carefully before use, or ask your pharmacist for advice.**

**Seek medical help urgently if you have any of the following:**

- **Trouble breathing**
- **High temperature**
- **Signs of infection such as redness or swelling at the rib joints**
- **Continuing or worsening pain**
- **Nausea**
- **Sweating**
- **Dizziness**

NHS website has more information about costochondritis -: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656/826319.