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Chiropractic Approach to Rib Cage Injuries

Presented by: **Total Health Systems**

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Introduction

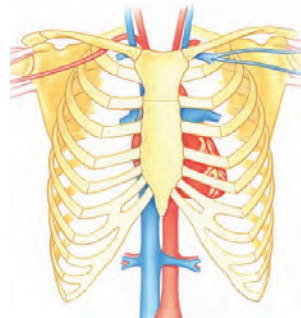
Rib cage injuries - any injury that affects your ribs or their supporting tissues - are notoriously painful and difficult to treat using conventional methods. Each breath can be painful with a rib cage injury, which can make this health problem a major source of discomfort for the injured individual. Because the ribs attach to the spine, rib injuries have been a special area of interest for chiropractors since the early days of the profession. Your chiropractor is knowledgeable about the underlying causes of rib cage injuries and is trained to address these health problems using natural, noninvasive and effective treatment approaches.

In this edition of the Wellness News Network, we delve deeper into rib cage injuries and how chiropractic care can successfully address these problems.

What is the Rib Cage?

The rib cage is an arrangement of bones in the upper body that surrounds the thoracic cavity and is made up of 24 ribs, 12 thoracic vertebrae, the sternum (breast plate) and xiphoid process (the small, palpable bone directly below the sternum). Cartilage, fascia, ligament, and muscle are other tissues that help

form the rib cage and allow it to perform its main functions: protecting the heart and lungs from trauma, assisting respiration, and providing an attachment point for numerous muscles.



According to a 2006 study published in the journal *Respiratory Physiology & Neurobiology*, subtle differences exist in the rib cages of men and women, most notably that rib cage volume is about 10 percent smaller in females than in males who are the same height, and that in females the ribs grow longer in relation to the spine and sternum than in males.¹

Most Common Rib Cage Injuries

Certain rib cage injuries occur with greater frequency than others. The following is a list of three of the most common rib cage injuries:

QUESTION:

How many ribs does the human body contain?

- A) 20
- B) 22
- C) 24

ANSWER:

- C) 24

QUESTION:

What is another name for the breast bone?

- A) Xiphoid
- B) Sternum
- C) Vertebrae

ANSWER:

- B) Sternum

Finish this sentence....

The function of the rib cage is to...

- A) provide an attachment point for muscles
- B) protect the heart and lungs
- C) assist respiration

ANSWER:

- A) B) and C) are all rib cage functions

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• **Intercostal Muscle Strain:** Strains or microtears of the intercostal muscles - groups of muscles that run between the ribs - are one of the most common rib cage injuries or problems. Any activity that involves aggressive torso twisting or arm swinging (e.g., golf and tennis) may cause intercostal muscles strains.²

• **Rib Fracture:** One of the most common rib cage injuries, rib fractures occur when force exerted on a rib bone overwhelms the rib's ability to withstand it. According to the Mayo Clinic, the leading cause of rib fractures is chest trauma, which may occur during a fall, motor vehicle accident, or contact sports injury.

• **Costovertebral Subluxation:** Irritation and discomfort can occur at the point where a rib attaches to the thoracic spine, at a location known as the costovertebral joint. Dysfunction at this joint, notes the Spine Health website, may cause upper back pain. Chiropractors are trained to look for costovertebral joint problems first when assessing possible causes of rib cage and upper back pain.

How Chiropractic Care Can Help

Conventional medical treatment of rib cage problems typically involves rest, prescription strength painkilling medication, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, icepacks, and activity avoidance. This treatment approach may be used for anything from rib fractures to bruised ribs. Chiropractic care takes a different approach however, using natural, conservative methods to speed recovery time and reduce pain.

The following is a list of possible treatment approaches your chiropractor may use to help heal your rib problem:

• **Chiropractic Adjustments:** Costovertebral joint adjustments involving the hands or a tool to help restore normal joint movement and reduce discomfort in the affected joint(s).

• **Cold Laser (Low-Level Light Therapy):** A painless treatment modality that works at the cellular level to help heal injured tissues and relieve pain or discomfort.

• **Instrument-Assisted Soft Tissue Mobilization:** A manual medicine technique that uses specialized tools to help reduce scar tissue and promote healing of damaged tissues.

• **Taping Procedures:** The use of elasticized tape to help reduce pain, swelling and inflammation in and around the injured area.

• **Trigger Point Therapy:** A type of soft tissue therapy that helps eliminate tight and painful nodules within a muscle.

• **Stretching Exercises:** Key rehabilitative exercises that help restore normal tissue tone in the muscles that act on or support the rib cage.

• **Hot/Cold Therapy:** The use of hot or cold compresses (used in isolation or sequentially) to encourage the healing of injured rib tissues.

Note: The type of treatment your chiropractor uses to treat your rib problem will depend on the nature of your problem and what therapies you will best tolerate, based on your pain levels.

Considerations

In some (rarer) cases rib pain may indicate a more serious underlying health problem that should be evaluated by a healthcare professional promptly to help prevent a worsening of your health. Talk with your chiropractor as soon as possible if you develop rib cage pain or discomfort.

Quote to Inspire

"I was born with music inside me. Music was one of my parts. Like my ribs - my blood."

Ray Charles

References and Sources:

1. Bellemare F, Fuamba T, Bourgeault A. Sexual dimorphism of human ribs. *Respiratory Physiology & Neurobiology*. 2006. Feb; 150(2-3): 233-239.

2. Better Health Channel. Rib injuries. http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bh-cv2/bh/articles.nsf/pages/Rib_injuries.



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