

*Insert patient details/patient sticker*

Respiratory medicine

# Pneumothorax

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet explains what a pneumothorax (sometimes known as a 'collapsed lung') is and how it is managed. Please feel free to ask our team any questions you have about the information below.

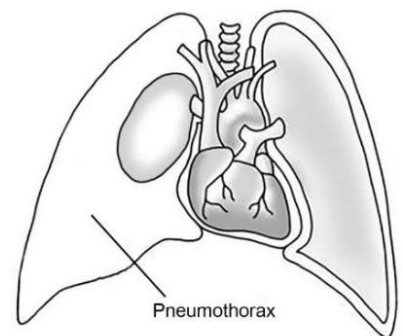
### What is a pneumothorax?

A pneumothorax is an abnormal collection of free air in the chest. It is caused by the escape of air from the outer part of the lung. It commonly causes pain in the chest and breathlessness. The pain is typically sharp, worse with deep breathing, and can start suddenly.

### Why do I have a pneumothorax?

There are several causes of a pneumothorax. The most common cause is smoking. Other causes include underlying lung diseases such as emphysema, and inherited conditions.

Sometimes a pneumothorax is caused by injury to the chest (including some medical procedures like lung biopsy). When not related to injury, a pneumothorax often happens unexpectedly with no obvious trigger. It probably relates to a weakness in an area of the lung.



### What happens next?

Given that your condition is safe and stable, the doctors have decided to discharge you. Your lungs should slowly absorb any remaining air trapped in the chest, but this can take several weeks. Any symptoms you still have should therefore continue to improve.

But if your symptoms get worse **you must go to A&E immediately**. The pneumothorax may be getting larger. This is uncommon.

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## Important guidance on air travel

Until the pneumothorax has completely disappeared **you must not travel by air**.

If you plan to fly, you must have a further chest X-ray to check the lung has returned to normal. **Air travel is not safe** until at least one week after this point.

## Could this happen again?

Having had a pneumothorax, you are now at a higher risk of pneumothorax in the future. So, if you ever experience similar symptoms again, please go to your local A&E.

If you have had more than one pneumothorax, there are treatments for preventing further episodes. These treatments include surgery.

**We strongly advise you not to smoke.** There is strong evidence that smoking makes another pneumothorax more likely.

You can find advice and support on quitting smoking at [www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/)

## Important guidance on scuba diving:

You must **never** scuba dive:

- unless you've had surgery to fix the pneumothorax
- **and** you've had confirmation that the surgery was successful

It could be fatal if you have another pneumothorax when swimming deep underwater.

## How to contact us

You will be contacted to attend a follow-up clinic with the pleural team. If you:

- do not receive an appointment,
- or if you have any questions or concerns leading up to your follow-up appointment

please contact the pleural team, Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 17.00.

call: **07876 138 418 / 07393 003 019**      email: [imperial.pleural@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pleural@nhs.net)

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## How do I make a comment about my visit?

If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**). The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries. They are often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

call: **020 3313 0088** email: [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net)

Or, if you need to **complain**, contact the Complaints department.

call: **020 3312 1337 / 1349** email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

write: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

Respiratory Medicine  
Published: September 2025  
Review date: September 2028  
Reference no: 2716  
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