

Emergency department

# Collapsed lung

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

A collapsed lung, (medically known as a pneumothorax) occurs when air becomes trapped in the space between the lung and the chest wall. The air enters this space either from the lung or from outside the body. It is confirmed by a chest x-ray.

A **primary** pneumothorax is when a pneumothorax develops for no apparent reason in a healthy person. It is very common and usually occurs in healthy young adults. Research is still on-going into the underlying cause for this.

A **secondary** pneumothorax occurs in people known to have lung problems.

Occasionally an injury to the chest may cause a collapsed lung.

### Symptoms

- Sudden, sharp chest pain that is worse when taking a deep breath or coughing
- Shortness of breath

### What to expect

The treatment will vary depending on the type of pneumothorax you have.

- In many cases you will not need any treatment as a smaller, less serious pneumothorax is likely to heal by itself within 1-2 weeks. However, a small pneumothorax may cause pain and / or discomfort and you will be prescribed painkillers on discharge.
- If the pneumothorax is large the doctors will remove the air either by:
  1. putting a needle into your chest and using a syringe to draw out the air or
  2. placing a hollow tube into the chest to remove the air. This tube usually stays in for 1-2 days and is removed before you leave hospital.

In both cases local skin numbing medication is used.

### Warning signs

Please return to your nearest A&E department immediately if you develop chest pain or breathlessness after leaving hospital. A very rare complication of a pneumothorax is called a tension pneumothorax which causes severe breathlessness and can be life-threatening as it can affect the functioning of your heart and lungs. **If you suspect this you must call 999 immediately.**

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## Life after a pneumothorax

- You will be able to return to work and get back to normal physical activities once you feel your symptoms have all eased
- Avoid activities which involve extreme exertion or physical contact until you are seen in clinic or after your follow-up x-ray
- Avoid air travel until you are advised to do so by your doctor (this may be your GP or doctor at the hospital and will be explained to you on discharge). Most people will be able to fly one week after their pneumothorax has completely improved
- Avoid scuba diving **permanently** unless you have had an operation to prevent the pneumothorax coming back
- Avoid remote places where access to medical care is limited until you have had the all clear from your doctor.
- If you are a smoker, stopping can reduce your risk of having another pneumothorax

## Useful emergency contacts

### **St Mary's Hospital's emergency department**

South Wharf Road  
London W2 1NY  
Telephone 020 3312 6330

### **Charing Cross Hospital's emergency department**

Fulham Palace Road  
London W6 8RF  
Telephone 020 3311 1005

### **Hammersmith Hospital's emergency department**

Du Cane Road  
London W12 0HS  
Telephone 020 3313 4691

### **Eye emergencies (24-hour)**

Western Eye Hospital  
171 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5YE  
Telephone 020 3312 3241

### **NHS 111**

If you have an urgent medical problem and are not sure what to do, call 111 and speak to a fully trained adviser. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **Alcohol liaison nurses**

Charing Cross and Hammersmith hospitals: 020 3313 0244  
St Mary's Hospital: 020 3312 7663

### **Drinkline**

Free helpline: 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 09.00–20.00, weekends 11.00–16.00)

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## **Sexual health clinic**

Jefferiss wing  
St Mary's Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY  
Telephone: 020 3312 1697 (general enquiries)  
020 3312 7583 (sexual health and HIV advice)

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

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. 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**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department  
Fourth floor  
Salton House  
St Mary's Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## **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**

## **Wi-fi**

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK\_FREE or WiFiSPARK\_PREMIUM