

What is Costochondritis?

Costochondritis is inflammation of the joint between a rib and the breastbone (sternum) or between the bony part of the rib and the rib cartilages. (Cartilage is a rubbery tissue that lines and cushions the surfaces of joints.) Another name for this problem is Tietze's syndrome.

It is more common in women than men and tends to occur more often in people over 40 years old.



How does it occur?

Sometimes costochondritis is caused by:

- an injury to the chest; for example, from falling or getting hit by something in the chest.
- an infection, such as a cold or flu.

Many times the cause cannot be found.



What are the symptoms?

The main symptom of costochondritis is pain or tenderness in the front of the chest near the breastbone. It occurs most often on the left side of the upper chest. It is usually a sharp pain that gets worse if you press on it or move certain ways (stretching, for instance).

Sometimes the pain may be confused with heart attack pain. See your healthcare provider right away for any chest pain.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and examine your chest.

Costochondritis is not a serious condition, but a heart attack is. Because the pain can be confused with a heart attack, you may need some tests for proper diagnosis of the problem.

How is it treated?

Costochondritis is treated with anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Acetaminophen may help the pain if you cannot or should not take anti-inflammatories.

How long will the effects last?

The pain of costochondritis usually lasts for a week or two. It does not cause any long-term problems.

How can I take care of myself?

- Avoid activities or movements that make the pain worse.
- Sometimes heat makes the pain better.

A heating pad on low can be put on the area for 20 minutes 4 to 8 times a day.

- When the pain is gone, go back to your normal activities slowly.
- Be sure to stretch and warm up properly before you start any strenuous



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