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Costochondritis

Costochondritis is the result of inflammation (irritation) of the cartilage of the front of the chest wall where the ribs attach to the breastbone. It causes local pain and tenderness of the chest around the breastbone. The most common sites for Costochondritis to occur are in the 2nd through 4th ribs at the level of the heart or breast (see picture below). The discomfort usually involves more than just one rib.

Break the word into three parts, and it becomes easier to understand. **COSTO / CHONDR / IT IS.**

1. **Costo** = The main part of the rib made of bone.
2. **Chondr** = A shorter piece of the rib made of cartilage (a softened type of bone; similar to the tissue forming the bridge in the outer part of the nose.).
3. **itis** = A common suffix meaning Inflammation (*or irritation*)

The inflammation most often occurs where the two parts of the rib come together (costochondral junction), and pressure over this spot will cause pain. Less commonly the pain is where the cartilage joins the "Breast Bone" or "sternum".

In the beginning, the pain is usually worsened by activity or exercise, and can also be very uncomfortable when taking a deep breath. **The pain can often be felt by simply touching the involved area.**

Eventually the pain subsides to a dull, constant ache or tenderness involving the cartilage and ribs on either side of the breastbone. The cause of this condition is usually unknown but it can be the result of trauma to the rib cage, a viral infection, part of an inflammatory illness or from repeated minor injury or unaccustomed activity, such as painting or moving furniture. The symptoms usually disappear without treatment.

Children may say their heart or lungs hurt because of the location of the pain (around the heart area) or because discomfort occurs when they take a deep breath. However there is no reason for alarm. Because of the inflammation (swelling) around the ribs, it may be uncomfortable to take a normal deep breath.

The heart and lungs are normal in children who experience the discomfort of costochondritis. If your child appears to be having shortness of breath or chest pain with vigorous exercise, it is important for your child to be examined.

Stress contributes to the pain because it makes the muscles tense. Other things that aggravate the pain are lifting, pushing, pulling, sneezing, coughing, long hours of driving, using the computer, repetitive motions and caffeine. Cold, rainy and humid weather also make the discomfort worse.

Treatment

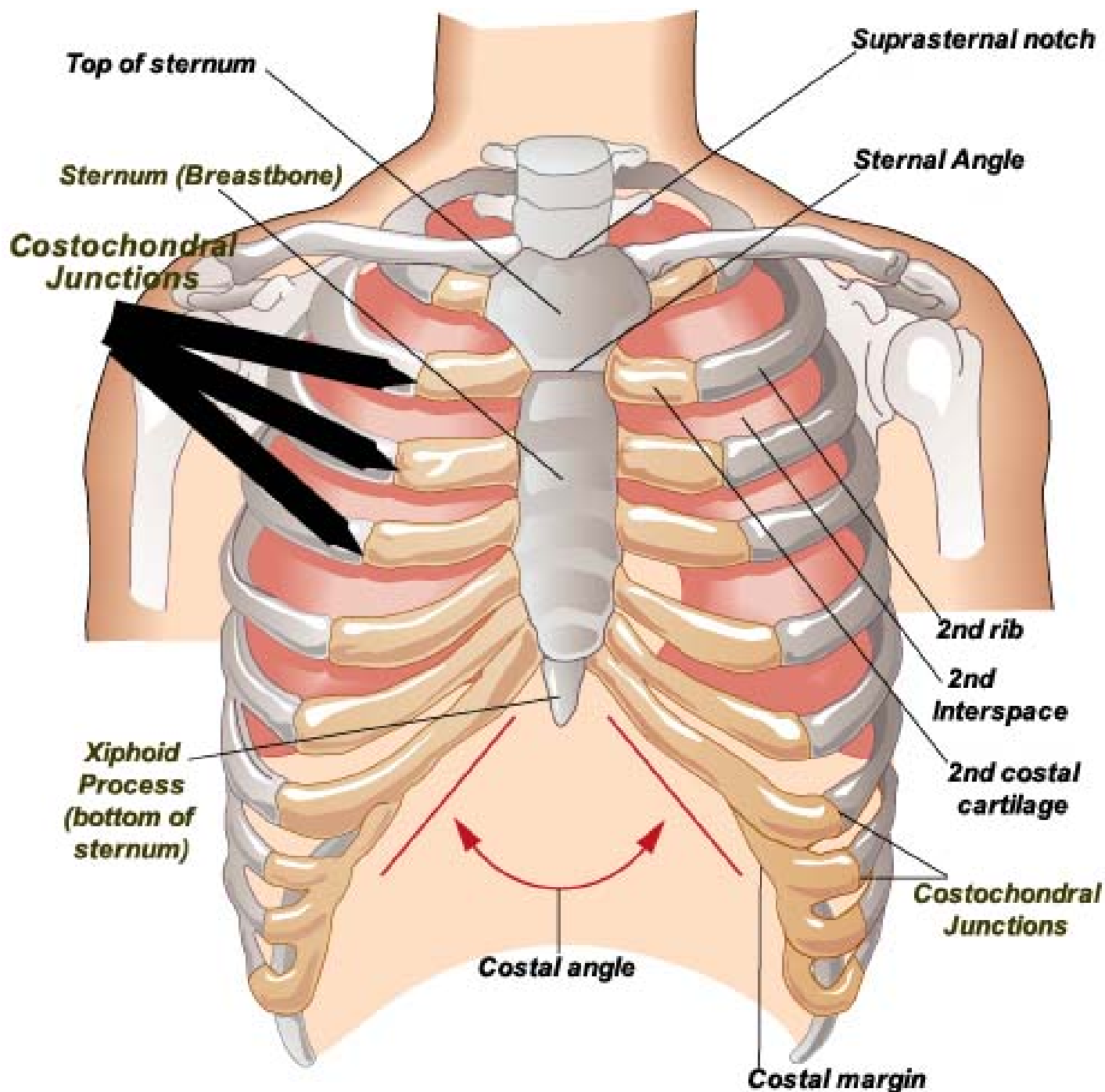
Most cases of costochondritis get better quickly with the following home self-treatment:

1. Rest until movement or exercise no longer causes discomfort. Exercise, deep breathing, and strain on the muscles of the chest may worsen the symptoms of pain and slow the healing process. As a general rule of thumb, avoid or limit activities that worsen your pain. (weight-lifting, push-ups)
2. Apply heat or ice to the affected area to help decrease any pain

3. OTC anti-inflammatory medications (ibuprofen) can be used for up to 2 weeks. Since the underlying problem is inflammation, ibuprofen will help decrease the pain by decreasing the inflammation.
4. Gradual return to exercise, using slow stretching to avoid re-injury.

Most of the time, the pain associated with costochondritis significantly improves within several weeks. While some pain may persist, it is usually mild and only associated with strenuous activity.

Costochondritis can reoccur. Having the condition once does not increase your chances of experiencing the symptoms again.



This picture shows the Costochondral Junctions where pain usually occurs.