

Chest Wall Disorder: Pectus Carinatum

Pectus carinatum is when the ribs and breastbone (sternum) grow outward and make the chest jut out. This gives the chest a birdlike appearance. That's why it is sometimes called "pigeon breast" or "pigeon chest."

Pectus carinatum can affect one side of the chest more than the other. It can get worse as kids get older and is more common in boys than girls. Severe pectus carinatum can make it hard to exercise or play sports, and cause chest pain.

Causes

There is no known cause but it may run in families. Kids who have it may have other health issues, such as connective tissue disorders.

Symptoms

Kids will have a chest that juts out but this often doesn't appear until age 11 or older.

Since the chest wall surrounds and protects the heart and lungs, children may:

- Feel short of breath, especially during exercise
- Have cramping in the chest when breathing in

How It Is Diagnosed

Your child's doctor will perform an exam on your child. If needed, the doctor might also order tests such as genetic testing (unlikely).

Treatment

Not all children need treatment. Mild pectus carinatum won't need treatment if it doesn't affect how the lungs or heart work.

When the condition is very noticeable, it can affect a person's self-image. In those cases, treatment will improve a child's emotional and physical well-being.

If treatment is needed, the options include:

- **Chest brace:** Kids whose bones are still growing can wear a chest brace.
- **Surgery:** A surgeon can fix the sternum using the Ravitch procedure.
- **Physical therapy (PT):** Doctors suggest all patients have PT to retrain breathing muscles when it is the root cause of the defect. Doctors may also suggest PT to strengthen weak chest muscles.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 7/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8356.