

Orthopaedic Connection

Would You Go To An Orthopaedic Surgeon For Chest Pain?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

What if I came back into your exam room after looking at your x-rays and said “I’m sorry to say it, but you have costochondritis.” Pause. The patient would probably blurt out “Gee Doc, how long do I have?” I’m not that mean to do that to one of my patients!

As it turns out I do know a lot about chest pain as an Orthopaedic Surgeon. No I didn’t take a residency in Cardiology also, but Orthopaedic Surgeons do know where the heart is and know what it is supposed to sound like.

O.K. What is Costochondritis?

It is an inflammatory condition of the chest wall that causes sharp pain which can be confused with angina pectoris (true chest pain). It can be pretty hard for patients to tell the difference between costochondritis and angina.

Anatomy lesson. The bony part of our ribs is not directly attached to the breast bone. The bone part of each rib ends in the front (anterior) part of the chest. Where the rib ends a rubbery cartilage like material continues and connects to the breast bone (sternum).

The Dilemma

Chest wall pain (costochondritis) can come on every bit as suddenly as angina pectoris. If you haven’t experienced angina before, it is probably impossible for you to know which it is.

Costochondritis never killed anyone, but angina..... Get where I’m going? There is good reason to get emergency help if you experience new or unexplained chest pain or pressure.

It’s not a good idea to waste time for fear of embarrassment that it isn’t a heart attack. Better to be embarrassed than dead. It’s up to you and your family to make the decision, but I would err on the side of caution, right? Good.

Who Is Affected?

Basically anyone, but it affects women slightly more often and women over 40. However, even children and young adults can be afflicted with costochondritis. So really I have to consider this in the differential diagnosis of chest pain in any of my patients.

Symptoms of Costochondritis

- It can come on suddenly or gradually
- Usually only one side of the sternum is affected
- Pain may be sharp or stabbing
- It may be dull
- Doesn’t improve with time
- Pain with a deep breath
- Pain when coughing
- Pain increases when you raise arm on affected side
- It can occur in one or more costosternal joints

It is taking longer than I thought to cover costochondritis and I am out of allotted space. I will conclude next week with additional information about Costochondritis or Orthopaedic Chest Pain.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I sincerely hope all of our loyal readers will take advantage of an endless amount of musculoskeletal information. It is easy! Log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com.

It gives access to 1) All Website articles, 2) Your Orthopaedic Connection, 3) Every GCH article from most recent to the first - full text! It covers everything I do in the office and hospital.

Good Health. Good Life. All the Best to you.

Dr. Haverbush