

Collapsed Lung: Pneumothorax

Your lungs, part of your respiratory system, do the important job of pulling in oxygen-rich air your body needs and pushing out carbon dioxide and other harmful stuff your body doesn't need.

The lungs are surrounded and protected by the rib cage....and by two thin layers of tissue called the pleura.

The very thin space between the 2 layers is called the pleural space. A liquid, called pleural fluid, is in that space.

A collapsed lung also called a pneumothorax happens when air builds up in the pleural space.

When the air increases in that space, pressure pushes onto the lung and it collapses.

This prevents your lungs from expanding the right way when you try to breathe in.

This may be caused by an injury to the rib cage or chest wall.

COPD and other diseases can also cause a pneumothorax.

The lungs hold a complex system of bronchial tubes. The oxygen-rich air travels through the bronchial tubes and into even smaller tubes called bronchioles. At the end of each bronchiole are tiny air sacs called alveoli.

COPD damages the alveoli. If damaged alveoli let air into the pleural space, pressure can build and prevent your lungs from expanding.

A pneumothorax may become deadly if the pressure in your chest prevents the lungs from getting enough oxygen into the blood.

As you recover, be sure to contact your doctor if you have any questions. Taking care of yourself after a collapsed lung can help you heal and recover sooner.

If you have shortness of breath or chest pain, call 911 for emergency care.