



Would you recognise a pneumothorax? Would you know what to do if you caused one?

Do you know how to avoid causing a pneumothorax? Would you recognise the symptoms if one occurred? Importantly – do you know what to do if you suspect that you may have caused a pneumothorax?

Have you read the [CMCNZ Safe Practice Standards and Guidelines](#)? If not, the time is now. Both Acupuncture NZ and NZASA have similar documents available on their websites as well.

There's also a pneumothorax safety video available [here](#).

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent is not simply asking your patient to tick a box on a form on their first visit. Every procedure you perform as part of any treatment – whether it is the first or whether the patient has been to you many times - needs to be explained in detail, including any known risk to the procedure and what you are doing to minimise that risk. The [CMCNZ website](#) clearly outlines the standard as well as guidelines for obtaining informed consent. If you haven't read them then do it today.

How to avoid a pneumothorax

Any point over the lungs that is not protected by bone or cartilage must be needled with great care. Depth and angle of needling must be appropriate for the body size of the patient. The lungs may be very close to the body surface, particularly at the points GB21 (Jian Jing), LU1 (Zhong Fu), BL11 Da Zhu, on a smaller framed person with low body weight so shallower needling is more appropriate than, for example, on a rugby player with strong and well-developed musculature. Avoid using needles longer than 25-30mm to minimise any risk. A 15mm needle may be more appropriate on a smaller person. When needling unprotected points over the lungs it is important to stress to the patient that movement or coughing could cause the needle to penetrate deeper so advise them to remain quite still whilst the needles are in place.

What are the symptoms of a pneumothorax?

The patient may experience chest pain, tightness across the chest, a dry cough, shortness of breath particularly on exertion. If any of these symptoms appear whilst the patient is in clinic



and you suspect a pneumothorax then you must call 111 for an ambulance immediately. These symptoms may not happen immediately and may come on hours after the treatment. If the patient calls and reports any of these symptoms then you must advise them to go immediately to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital.

What to do next?

As a registered practitioner you are obliged to report the causation of a pneumothorax. See the CMCNZ Safe Practice Guidance document for full information. Complete an Incident Report form and send it through to your professional body. Both Acupuncture NZ and NZASA have these available on their websites or call the office and have it emailed to you. Follow up with your patient – sometimes a pneumothorax can result in several days' hospitalisation and substantial recovery time.

CMCNZ will continue to work with the schools and the professional organisations to ensure that all practitioners are practising safely and taking all measures to minimise risks to their patients.

It is up to you as a practitioner to ensure that you have read and understood all the CMCNZ policies and documents.

Require further assistance?

We are here to help – if there is anything you don't understand, have further questions about, or you require more guidance, email us at reception@chinesemedicinecouncil.org.nz or give us a call at (04) 978 5040.