

Information for Patients in a Cast

Trauma and Orthopaedics

This leaflet helps to explain how to look after your cast. However if you have any particular worries please ask staff at the hospital for more information at any time.

What is a cast used for?

It is used to support and hold a fractured (broken) bone in place while it heals. A cast can also be applied after certain types of operations. A cast is also used in some conditions such as toe walking, cerebral palsy or to stretch muscles.

What is a cast made of?

A cast is made of either plaster of paris or a more lightweight synthetic material.

What are the different types of cast?

Initially you may have a 'half' plaster of paris called a 'backslab' which allows for swelling. At a later date this may be changed to a cast that completely fits around your limb. This cast may be made of synthetic material which can be lighter than plaster of paris but is hard wearing. Softcast is preferred for small children as it can be removed without using the plaster saw.

How long does a cast take to dry?

Plaster of paris takes up to eight minutes to set. However it can take 48 hours before it is completely dry. While the plaster of paris is drying it will feel warm and then gradually cool.

Synthetic cast sets in around five minutes. Depending on the type of synthetic cast it will be around 15 to 45 minutes before it is completely dry.

How long will I have the cast on for?

Your surgeon will explain how long you are likely to have the cast on for. The length of time will depend on your age, general health and type of fracture.

How do I care for the cast?

- Raise your injured limb whenever possible. This will help to reduce pain and swelling. When sitting, rest your arm on a pillow or cushion. If you have a cast on your leg or foot, when sitting or lying, try to keep your foot higher than your hip
- Do not attempt to dry a newly applied cast with any direct heat e.g. sitting in front of a fire or with a hair-dryer. This can damage the cast and burn the skin underneath

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

- Do not rest the cast on anything that may cause a ridge, such as the edge of a chair, particularly whilst it is drying
- Do not get the cast wet - the cast could become soft then it won't provide the necessary support. A wet cast can also irritate the skin underneath. If the cast does get wet it will probably need to be changed
- Do not directly rest your heel on any surface whilst in a lower limb cast as this can cause a pressure injury
- If you experience an itch don't poke anything down the cast or put anything into it as this may damage the skin or the cast
- Do not try to cut, trim or pad the edges of the cast yourself
- Check your cast each day. Look for any damage such as cracks or softening. Also check your skin around the cast for any redness or sores
- If you want to write on the cast wait until it is completely dry.

Walking aids and exercises.

If you have been given any walking aids for example, crutches, make sure you use them correctly.

Continue with any exercises that you have been advised to do. The stretch to the muscles will cause some discomfort which should settle quickly with appropriate pain relief. However if a child continues to be upset or seems to be in pain please seek advice from either the plaster room or physiotherapy department at the hospital. (Telephone numbers can be located at the end of this leaflet).

Can I use the bath or shower with a cast on?

Yes, but the cast must be kept dry. You may wish to purchase a product that covers and protects the cast whilst using the bath or shower. Information is available on the wards and in the outpatients clinics.

If you do use the bath or shower while you have the cast on it is always advisable to make sure that you are not alone in your home just in case you need assistance.

When should I contact the hospital?

If you develop significant pain in the leg, especially the calf, if you develop swelling in your leg, if you experience chest pain or difficulty in breathing you should contact the hospital immediately to rule out a blood clot in your legs or lungs.

You should contact the hospital for advice if you experience any of the following:

- Severe pain or inability to move your fingers or toes of the affected limb.

If the fingers or toes of the affected limb:

- Go white or blue
- Are difficult to move
- Become more painful or swollen
- Constant numbness & tingling
- Rubbing, soreness, severe itching or burning under the cast
- If your cast feels too loose or too tight
- If it becomes soft, dented, cracked or wet
- If the child remains upset and does not settle within 24 to 48 hours.

How is the cast removed?

The cast will be removed by staff at the hospital. Never attempt to remove any type of cast yourself. A backslab is usually removed using bandage scissors. If you have a 'softcast' the hospital staff may remove it carefully unwrapping the plaster bandages

Any other cast is removed using a special type of saw called a plaster saw. If you have a 'softcast' the hospital staff may remove it carefully unwrapping the plaster bandages.

Alternatively, they may use bandage scissors or a plaster saw.

Contact numbers

- Orthopaedic / Fracture Clinic 01902 695380
- Plaster Room number 01902 307999 ext. 86071

Please contact this clinic: Monday to Thursday between 08:30 until 16:00 and Friday between 08:30 until 12:30

Alternatively, out of these hours please phone the accident and emergency department on the number below.

- Emergency Department 01902 307999 ext 85080
- Main Hospital switchboard 01902 307999

For Paediatric Physiotherapy 01902 307999 and ask switchboard to bleep 1586 or 3707

How to care for your plaster cast

Do's

- Elevate your injured limb, above heart level as much as possible
 - This will help to reduce pain and swelling. (For every 20 - 30 minutes the affected limb is down, you should elevate 2- 3 hours to decrease swelling)
- Check your plaster cast daily to ensure no problems are present
- Keep heel off loaded at all times, if lower limb is in plaster cast
- You should exercise all joints on injured limb, which are not in a plaster cast - For five minutes every hour during the day.

Do NOT's

- Do NOT get the cast wet
- Do NOT trim or cut your plaster cast
- Never apply external heat to your plaster cast. i.e. (Hairdryer - Fireplace)
- Do NOT put jewellery on effected limb; all jewellery must be removed following injury
- Do not wear arm sling all the time - if issued - take off for bed unless instructed otherwise
- Do NOT rest your heel on any surface whilst in plaster cast to the lower limb.
 - This reduces the chance of any possible pressure ulcer
- Do NOT put anything inside your plaster cast
- Do NOT scratch inside your cast with any object
- Do NOT rest the plaster cast on anything that will cause a ridge / dent whilst still wet.

You should ring the hospital immediately if:

- Severe pain or inability to move your fingers or toes of the effected limb.
- If the fingers or toes of the effected limb:
 - Go white or blue.
 - Feel numb or constant pins & needles
- Rubbing, soreness or burning under the plaster cast
- If the cast feels to loose or tight
- If the cast becomes dented - cracked or wet
- If the child remains upset and does not settle within 24 - 48 hours.

References:

1. Depuy casting, 2003. Indications and directions for use plaster of paris. Johnson & Johnson
2. Dynacast PII, accessed april 2008. Advanced synthetic cast tape. BSN medical ltd
3. 3MTM scotchcast™ poly plus, 2006. Casting tape. 3M health care
4. Better health channel, 1999/2008. Plaster care (online) available from <http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au?BHCV2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/plastercae?open>
5. 3MTM soft cast, accessed April 2008. Semi-rigid casting tape. 3M health care.

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。