

Caring for your leg cast / plaster (Adult)

Your leg has been placed in a cast (also called a plaster) to prevent bones from moving and to allow the fracture time to rest and heal. If you care for the cast correctly, you will increase your chances of making an early recovery.

This information is about caring for your cast. **Read this information carefully before leaving the Orthopaedic clinic** and ask the staff about anything you are unsure of.

Waiting for the plaster to dry

A plaster of paris leg cast takes 48 hours to dry . A fibreglass leg cast takes 30 minutes. Whilst the cast is drying rest your cast on something soft e.g. pillows. Avoid hard surfaces as they may damage your cast.

Don't use a heater or hairdryer to make the cast dry faster - you could burn your skin or crack the plaster.

Some guideline Do's

- Exercise your toes for 5 minutes every hour
- Also exercise the knee joint above the cast for 5 minutes every hour. This will help prevent joint stiffness
- Check the colour of your toes. They should be pink. Squeeze the nail white, then release. The nail should immediately return to a pink colour
- Watch for swelling. Compare the foot in the cast to the other foot. Are they the same size?
- In the first week after the injury it is important to take regular pain relief as instructed
- Keep the cast clean and dry. (See showering / bathing instructions heading)
- Do use crutches as instructed, and bring them to clinic every visit, even if you are not using them to walk with
- Phone the Orthopaedic clinic for an appointment if the plaster, becomes loose,

- cracks, softens, is rubbing or uncomfortable

Some guideline Don'ts

- Don't rest your plaster on a hard surface until it is dry
- Don't poke anything down the plaster – you may cause a wound
- Don't remove the plaster, trim it or make other adjustments. Instead if it is causing you problems, phone for an appointment
- Don't hesitate to phone Orthopaedic clinic for advice
- Don't let walk on your plaster unless you have been instructed to do so

Keeping your cast dry during bathing or showering

The cast is not waterproof and needs to be kept dry.

Wrap a towel around the cast. Place your leg in a plastic bag (ensuring that the bag has no holes) large enough to cover the cast. Secure the bag with tape e.g. masking tape or cellotape.

Place your leg on the edge of the bath, or a stool, just outside the shower.

If your cast will not fit into a plastic bag, you must not bath or shower. You will need to have thorough washes.

It is possible to purchase a shaped latex cast cover for bathing or showering. Ask the Orthopaedic Clinic Nurse for more information.

Clothing

You can wear any clothing that can easily be put on and off. You may wish to add a zip or Velcro to the seam to allow you to wear long trousers.

If a walking sole is added to your cast, it will become wider at the foot and you may not be able to wear the same trousers.

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It is important that you wear trousers with wide legs or a skirt when attending Orthopaedic clinic appointments as your cast may be changed.

When should I seek help?

Phone immediately (Wellington Orthopaedic clinic / Kenepuru Outpatients during clinic hours or Emergency Dept if after hours) **if you have:**

- Severe or Increasing pain under the cast which is not helped by pain relief
- A very swollen foot which does not decrease with elevating the leg for 20 minutes
- A change in the temperature or colour of your arm. A hot foot with purple or red toes or a cold foot which is dusky or white
- Numbness or tingling in their toes or you cannot move or straighten your toes.
- Cramping in your calf muscle
- A wound under the plaster, and you are experiencing increased pain, fever, the cast smells (odour) or ooze from the cast

Phone during clinic hours (see contact details)

- If your plaster is soft or cracked
- Is uncomfortable or rubbing
- Has become loose

Follow-up appointments

It is important that you return for their follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment where your injury and progress is reviewed. An x-ray is taken to ensure that the bone is healing and in the correct place. This may be followed up with several appointments before the cast is removed.

Removing your cast

The cast will be removed with a specially designed saw which cuts through the cast, but will not cut the skin. Cast removal is a fast and painless process.

Following removal of the cast, you may experience increased pain or swelling.

Following cast removal you will need to use your crutches for some time. Your doctor will discuss

exercises with you, and you may need to attend physiotherapy.

You should not return to work or do any sporting activity until instructed to do so.

Contact us:

Remember If you do not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5.30pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.