

# Caring for your arm cast / plaster (Adult)

Your arm 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 arm cast takes 24 hours to dry. A fibreglass arm cast takes 30 minutes. Whilst the cast is drying rest your cast on something soft e.g. a pillow or in a sling. 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.

Elevate your arm above the level of their heart whenever possible. In a sling when moving about or on pillows when sitting. This is especially important during the first 48 hours to help prevent swelling.

## Some guideline Do's

- Exercise your fingers for 5 minutes every hour
- Also exercise the joint above the cast (your elbow or shoulder), for 5 minutes every hour. This will help prevent joint stiffness
- Check the colour of your fingers. They should be pink. Squeeze the nail white, then release. The nail should immediately return to a pink colour
- Watch for swelling. Compare the hand in the cast to the other hand. 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)
- 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 use the sling for longer than instructed

## Keeping your cast dry during bathing or showering

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

Wrap a towel around the cast. Place your arm 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.

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 which can easily be put on and off. Loose fitting clothes with wide sleeves are best. Dressing and undressing can be painful. To minimise discomfort follow these instructions:

[continued]

When putting on the shirt or top:

- Put the affected arm into the sleeve of the shirt. Move the shirt sleeve or top to above the elbow
- Put your head through the neck of the shirt or top
- Put the unaffected arm through the sleeve last

When removing the shirt or top:

- Remove the unaffected arm from the sleeve
- Take the shirt or top over your head
- Remove the affected arm last

## 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
- You have a very swollen hand which does not decrease with elevating the arm for 20 minutes
- There is a change in the temperature or colour of your arm. A hot hand with purple or red fingers or a cold hand which is dusky or white
- You have numbness or tingling in your fingers or you cannot move or straighten your fingers
- There is 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 your follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment where your injury and progress is reviewed. An x-ray will be 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.

Your doctor will discuss exercises with you, and you may need to attend physiotherapy.

You should not return to work or 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: 8am-9.30pm, Monday to Friday  
(including Public Holidays)  
Sat & Sunday 9am - 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: 8am - 4.30pm, Monday to Friday  
(excluding Public Holidays)

**Outside of these hours** please contact the Wellington Orthopaedic Clinic on (04) 385 5954.

If they are closed contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department on (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.