

Cast removal what to expect #3 Patient Information Leaflet



Now your cast is off, self help is the key!

Follow the advice given to you by your doctor and the staff in the clinic.

Your skin will be dry and you might still have some persistent bruising. The bruising may not disappear for some time after your mobilisation.

When your cast is removed your limb will feel very strange to be free. Your limb will be a little weak and feel vulnerable and you will also feel it is unsteady when you start to use it. This is due to the loss of muscle whilst in a cast. Your joints can be very stiff and you may experience some discomfort or pain when you start to flex the joints and use them for the first time.

You may even have more pain and some swelling as you begin to use your joints for the first time. Do not worry it is normal to experience some discomfort as you start to mobilise

However you will have to pace yourself, do not over do your exercises and mobilisation, you may not be able to start normal activities straight away. It will take time for your muscles to recover their full strength.

Severe injuries will take more time to settle down and begin to feel normal. The discomfort should slowly subside and could take up to 10 -14 days to improve. If the discomfort increases and the swelling and pain become worse during this time please contact the clinic for advice.

Give your injured limb a warm wash to relax the soft tissues and moisturising cream will help the dry skin which can sometimes form. Do not scratch, rub or scrub your limb as this can cause soreness or bleeding. This is because the skin is very sensitive after being in the cast. It can take several washes before the skin becomes normal.

Physiotherapy is not always necessary. Your doctor may not request it as patient injuries are not all the same. If you are sent to Physiotherapy you will be treated, advised and shown the exercises required for your particular injury and recovery by the therapist. **Do not wait for your Physiotherapy appointment**, it is important to start your basic exercises as soon as possible.

After your cast is removed

- Do start gentle exercises as recommended.
- Do soak your limb in a nice warm bath to relax and ease the stiffness and help remove the dry skin. (Please note it is important not to soak your limb if you still have pins and or a wound. On removal of stitches, staples and pins, you need to wait 2 days before you can soak your limb).
- With leg / ankle / foot injuries you may be advised to keep your frame, crutches or sticks for a short time so that you can build your confidence and muscles if they feel too weak.
- You can go swimming to help strengthen your limb. This is a good supportive exercise, that will not put too much pressure on your recovering injury.
- Do take time to rest your limb, allowing it to recover between each period of exercise, then you can try again.

Don't

- Do not commence strenuous activities too soon after your cast is removed. Give yourself time to regain lost muscle tone.
- Do not attempt to drive or operate machinery until you are confident that you have sufficient strength and are safe to do so. Could you react quickly in an emergency ?
- Do not overdo your exercises or expect to go straight back to normal activities, for example, gardening, lifting heavy objects after a wrist injury or walking the dog or long distances to the shops after an ankle injury. First you may feel very well and believe you can commence normal mobilisation, only to find by the end of the day your limb reacts by becoming painful and swollen. Try to be aware that your limb is still recovering and needs to be exercised steadily or you may suffer further problems.

Upper Limb Mobilisation

Firstly give your arm/wrist/hand a nice soak in warm soapy water. This will relax your muscles and help make them feel ready to start your exercises.

You can massage your limb using moisturising cream for any dry skin. This will assist the blood to circulate.

Start your exercises by making a tight fist and then stretching your fingers and hand wide in a pumping action. Keep this going for a few minutes at least every 30 minutes.

Now flex and bend your wrist up and down as high and low as possible.

It may feel too weak to move on its own, so you can use your good hand to act as a support, helping the injured limbs movements to recover.

Now twist your hand as if you are opening a door, left to right. This movement can be quite sore, and is the last to recover.

Next point your finger and rotate your hand in both directions to draw large circles in the air.

If you have had a long arm cast on you will need to move and loosen your elbow and shoulder also.

To exercise / mobilise your wrist, place your palms together as flat as possible then raise your elbows, keeping your palms touching. Try to do this at least 6 times.

Now place the backs of your hands together with your arms stretched in front of you, then bend your elbows bringing your hands towards you, while keeping the backs together, repeat this at least 6 times.

To begin with the exercises can be hard to do without cheating. Keep trying until you can achieve them without discomfort and cheating.

For the elbow, straighten your arm as much as possible, then bend your arm, up across your body to touch your opposite shoulder.

To exercise the shoulder, reach up to the ceiling and back down to the side. Now lock your elbow, point your arm forwards, slide it along out to the side, then rest down to your side. This can then be followed by slowly making large circles in the air with your arm.

At first all these exercises can be a little daunting to undertake, and may cause aches and pains. This discomfort will slowly pass, but how long, depends on the original injury, length of time spent in a cast and on the individuals will power.

If the exercises become too sore, stop them for a while, take a rest to allow your muscles and soft tissue to relax and recover before trying again.

You may be advised to take painkillers and carry on with your exercises.

In time, and with perseverance you will regain normal movements and activities. However this can take many months of work and patience, (depending on the severity of the initial injury) .

Occasionally as you begin normal movements you may feel strange sensations such as hot and cold, pins and needles or sudden spasms. These feeling are caused by your nerves beginning to recover and are quite normal, but may take time to improve.

Lower Limb Mobilisation

Firstly give your ankle, foot and leg a nice soak in warm soapy water. This will relax your muscles and feel good ready to start your exercises.

You can massage your limb using moisturising cream for any dry skin. This will also assist the blood to circulate.

Start your exercises in a seated position, pointing your toes up to the ceiling, then down toward the floor. Followed by making circles with your toes which will help the ankle mobilisation.

If your knee feels stiff after being in a long leg cast, sit on the edge of a chair or a bed and raise your lower leg up until it is straight,

hold it in that position for a few seconds and then lower gently. This should be repeated at least 12 times plus every hour until your stiffness has gone.

Your thigh and leg muscles will be a little thin and wasted and will need building up. Sit back or lie on a couch or bed with your legs flat, now slowly raise the leg up and down keeping it as straight as possible. This should be repeated at least 6 times every hour. Increase lifts as the muscles recover and build back to normal.

If after the cast is removed, your leg feels to weak and insecure, keep your crutches or a stick for a little longer while until your muscle strength and confidence is regained.

At first all these exercises can be a little hard to undertake, and may cause aches and pains. This discomfort will slowly pass, but how long, depends on the original injury, length of time spent in a cast and an individuals requirements.

Pace yourself!

If the exercises become too sore, stop them for a while, take a rest to allow your muscles and soft tissue to relax and recover before trying again. You may be advised to take painkillers and carry on with your exercises

In time and with determination, you will regain normal movements and activities. However this can take weeks of work and patience (depending on the severity of the initial injury) In some cases (due to individual patients complex injuries,) normal mobilisation/activities may not be regained totally. This can be hard to judge and may require a longer recovery time. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Occasionally as you begin normal movements you may feel strange sensations such as hot and cold, pins and needles or sudden spasms. These feelings are caused by your nerves beginning to recover and is quite normal but may take time to improve.

Bandages and supports

Elastic support stockings

After cast removal the doctor may advise that you would benefit from having a elastic support stocking. This will help give you confidence and assist you to begin your exercises. It should not be kept on for more than 7 days unless advised, as it has a tendency to make you reliant on it. The sooner you discard it, the better it is for your recovery. The elastic support must be removed when you go to bed or it will cause restriction and swelling.

Wool and crepe bandage

The doctor may wish you to have a wool and crepe bandage which pads and supports your limb. This can help when the injury is still very tender. However it is best for you to work towards its removal as soon as possible. As the discomfort improves it can be replaced for a short time with just the crepe bandage without the wool or an elastic support (as above).

Wrist splint

The doctor may prescribe the use of a wrist splint, which should be worn as firmly as possible without stopping your circulation. Underneath is a none elastic stocking, which is used to help keep the splint from becoming too soiled. Unless instructed otherwise, you may take it off to wash or do some gentle exercises as described on previous pages. It is important to try to free yourself of the splint as it will act like a cast and weaken your soft tissues further. In time you will only require it for support when undertaking normal or heavy duties.

Knee Splint

The doctor may prescribe the use of a knee splint, which should be worn as firmly as possible without stopping your circulation. It may also have an elastic support stocking underneath it. This is to help keep the splint from slipping down during walking. Unless instructed otherwise, you may take it off to bathe or do some gentle exercises as described on previous pages.

Editorial Board Number: 0859/09, Issue Number: 02
Reviewed on: August 2009, Review Date: August 2011

University Hospital of South Manchester, Wythenshawe Hospital, M23 9LT