

# Looking after your cast

## #2 Patient Information Leaflet



## **Patient care of Plaster or Resin casts**

The following instructions are very important for your well being. Please read through them carefully.

### **Upper Limb Casts**

- Keep the cast raised in a sling for as long as you are advised. If the cast is allowed to hang down, it may cause your arm or hand to swell making the cast tight.
- Exercise your fingers very often during the day. They must be stretched out straight and then be made in to a tight fist in a fluid pumping action.
- You may need to help this exercise with your good hand; it could hurt to exercise. Use painkillers and keep trying.
- Do not forget to exercise your elbow and shoulder so that they do not stiffen and blood flow is encouraged.
- You can take your arm out of the sling and place it on a pillow on your knee when you are sitting down.
- You can also use your hand (unless told otherwise) for light work such as reading, writing, eating and dressing. This will help reduce the swelling further.

## **Lower Limbs Casts.**

- Do not walk on your cast unless you are told to do so. The cast will break up and will further damage your injury.
- You must elevate your leg a little higher than your hip. Make sure the leg is on a soft support from the ankle area to the top of the leg. This will help prevent any swelling.
- If you are given permission to walk on the cast it does need to dry and set first. This will take 24-48 hours for the plaster casts and 20 minutes for the resin casts. In this time do not allow the cast to rest on a hard surface as it will dent and may cause a pressure sore.
- Try to exercise the knee ( if it is free) and hip by getting up and walking around with the use of a walking aid at least once every hour for 5 minutes.
- If you are unable to get up, do leg extensions from the edge of a chair and straight leg raises, all with strong steady movements.

## **Do not do the following: -**

- Allow your cast to get wet.
- Cut or remove the cast.
- Allow any item to get down the cast.
- Put any weight on the cast unless you are told to do so and only if a shoe is provided.
- Apply any heat to the cast.
- Use any hand or power tools to cut or remove the cast.
- Paint it as this could cause skin irritation when it soaks in.
- Wrap it in plastic for long periods, this will cause the cast to go damp.
- Scratch under the cast with wire, pens, sticks of wood or knitting needles. A scratch under a cast can get infected.
- Operate machinery, drive or ride or allow your child to ride a bike, skate board or play sports.
- Fly abroad without discussions with the doctor or airline.
- For flying we may recommend the cast is split for the flight. However with some injuries the doctor will advise the cast should not be split and your trip be delayed until you recover

**Please telephone the clinic if you have any of the following problems with the cast on:- 0161 291 6138.**

To avoid long waiting times you must phone for an appointment prior to your arrival to the clinic.

- If the cast rubs your skin at the edges or inside the cast itself.
- Your fingers or toes become cold and blue or white with a wax like appearance.
- Your fingers/toes and limb suddenly become very painful, and will not ease.
- If you have constant numbness or/and pins and needles which will not ease.
- The cast becomes very tight. (instead of firm)
- You loose power in the use of your hand/arm or leg.
- You notice a strong smell (that is not sweat) coming from the cast or discharge appearing on the surface of the cast.

If you are experiencing problems when the Fracture Clinic is closed, telephone the Accident & Emergency department, Tel:- 291 6040.

## **You can expect: -**

- Some bruising to show at the fingers, elbow and toes. sensations such as, hot and cold, slight and occasional numbness, tingling, pins and needles or little electric shocks. These are all part of the healing process.
- Twisting of the limb is the last movement you will be able to perform with out any pain.
- The pain should be at its worst, 2-3 days after your injury. Then it should slowly improve as you follow the advice given.
- The cast may tighten and go slack at different times of the day, depending on you activities.
- Once the cast is removed you will need to pace yourself. Do not try to do too much at first. The injured area may swell a little and feel stiff and slightly painful to begin with.
- When the cast is removed take a wash but do not scrub or scratch your skin, it is too sensitive and can bleed and become sore. It may take several gentle washes for the skin to feel normal.
- A little moisturising cream will help. If you have a scar do not allow the it to be exposed to the sun for at least 12 months.
- The limb tends to lose weight while in the cast due to the muscle wastage. This will return to normal quite soon, with use and exercise.
- X-rays and Physiotherapy are not always needed. This will depend on your particular injury.
- The bone around the area of the break will feel and sometimes look a little thickened. This is normal and it will gradually reduce in time.

## **Removal of the cast.**

- Slabs and splints are removed with bandage scissors only. Full casts are removed with shears or the cast saw.
- The cast saw does not spin but oscillates and vibrates, it has a vacuum to extract the dust. It will tickle but is very noisy.
- Some casts may have a dressing underneath this may give you the feeling it is stuck. Do not worry it will be soaked to remove it.
- To have stitches or clips removed is similar to having a splinter taken out.
- If you have pins to hold your bones while they heal, remember bone is like your hair or nails, they do not have a feeling in them.

## **Life style advice and recovery: -**

- A good balanced diet is always recommended to help you recover from an injury with extra foods that contain or help manufacture calcium, for example cheese or milk.
- Smoking and drinking of alcohol is never good for you and it may in fact slow down new bone development.
- Gentle exercise is recommended as you do not want your injured limb to stiffen up.
- Even if you are feeling well and believe you can do normal activities like house work, gardening, shopping or cycling. Don't, just do the basics.
- Do not listen to every bodies broken bone experience, no two fractures are the same. So what was good for your friends injury may not be right for yours.

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