

## Plaster Care Advice

**You have a broken (or suspected broken) bone which has been put into a plaster cast. These instructions will help you take care of your plaster.**

To care for your plaster you need to	You shouldn't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be careful with your plaster for the first 48 hrs as it takes this long to dry out.</li> <li>• Avoid getting dents in it by resting your arm or leg on a pillow or cushion and keep it clean and dry. If it gets dirty it may start to crack and if it gets wet it will become soft and will lose its shape. You can use a cast protector (<i>you can buy these – ask for a leaflet</i>) to keep it dry if you are bathing or showering, but do not leave it on too long as it may restrict circulation. Also, the inside of the bag may become wet making the plaster soft.</li> <li>• If your plaster cracks or becomes loose or soft before you have had your follow up appointment in Fracture Clinic then you need to return to the department where you were seen.</li> <li>• Keep your arm or leg raised (elevated) as much as possible, especially for the first few days. This is because your limb may become swollen if it hangs down, making your cast feel tight and may become painful. Your hand should be higher than your heart - if you have been given a sling, wear it for 24-48 hours unless you have been told otherwise. Your foot should be higher than your hip and raise the foot end of your mattress (rather than put your foot on a pillow) to help reduce swelling overnight.</li> <li>• Move the joints not fixed in the plaster as much as possible. This is important especially for fingers, toes and shoulders to keep them from getting stiff – please see the exercises below.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to remove or cut your plaster – this could cause you serious problems and may mean your broken bone won't heal properly.</li> <li>• Put anything down your plaster to scratch - this can cause a wound which can become infected.</li> <li>• Remove the padding - this helps to protect skin and hold the broken bone in place.</li> <li>• Put talcum powder, scent, or deodorant inside your cast to disguise any nasty smells – if your plaster does smell a lot it needs to be checked out.</li> <li>• Get it too hot – it might crack your cast.</li> <li>• Cover the plaster with a plastic bag in wet weather - water may collect inside the bag making the plaster soft.</li> </ul>

**As your arm or leg is enclosed inside the plaster, it's possible that may swell and these are some of the things you need to look out for:**

- your arm or leg becoming more painful *or*
- your fingers or toes becoming swollen or pale/blue or very cold *or*
- tingling in your fingers or toes *or*
- you can't move your fingers or toes

**If you do have any of these symptoms then you should elevate your arm or leg for 30mins. If this does not improve things then you should return to the department where you were seen straight away.**

**Exercises to do when you have a plaster on.**

Exercise, like medication, requires a specific dose. Not enough will be of no benefit, and too much may do harm. Only exercise to a comfortable level but expect mild discomfort - this is normal, as long as it settles during the day.

Try to do them every morning, midday, and evening (10 repeats) as this will help to prevent your joints getting stiff, minimise painful swelling by improving circulation; maintain some strength in your arm, hand and leg muscles.

**If your arm is in plaster: Shoulder, elbow and hand exercises**

Take your sling off to do your exercises - if your elbow is in a plaster, you won't be able to do exercises 2, 3 or 4. Repeat all the exercises 10 times.

1. Raise your arm above your head (if necessary, help it with the other hand)
2. Touch the back of your neck with your hand.
3. Touch the small of your back with your hand.
4. Straighten and bend your elbow.
5. Make a tight fist with your fingers and thumb, relax it then make a fist again.
6. Spread your fingers and thumb wide apart, relax and then spread them again.
7. Touch the tip of each finger with your thumb.

**If you are at all concerned about your injury, please contact the relevant**

**Emergency Department: Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287**

**Or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**

**Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**

**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

***If your leg is in plaster: Toe, knee and hip exercises.***

Depending upon the how long your cast is, you may not be able to exercise all of your leg joints. Repeat all the exercises 10 times.

1. Wiggle your toes.
2. Curl your toes under, hold for five seconds and release. Stretch your toes out, hold for five seconds and release.
3. Raise your leg a few inches above the floor and hold for five seconds and then lower again.
4. Bend and then straighten your knee as far as it will go and hold for five seconds. Then straighten your leg out as far as you can and hold for five seconds.
5. Move your leg out to the side and back, to keep your hip moving freely.
6. Put a pillow behind your knee and push your knee back into it – you should feel your thigh muscles get tighter (if you have a full leg cast you can press the back of your knee into the plaster – to feel the same effect). If your ankle is free, pull your toes towards you at the same time.

**If you have symptoms such as pain in the calf, the chest, or become short of breath, then please attend the Emergency Department (Not Minor Injury Unit) at the Grange University hospital.**

**You will have been given an information letter about your follow up with Trauma and Orthopaedics. If you have any concerns about when you will be seen, please contact them directly on the telephone number on the leaflet.**