

Care and management of a plaster or fibreglass cast

This leaflet explains about cast care and management for orthopaedic patients. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

What are plaster casts and why do you have one?

Your recent orthopaedic surgery or injury means you need to wear a cast. Casts are made up of bandage and padding, with a hard durable covering. They allow the damaged limb to keep in position, so that the surgery has time to heal, or to allow the broken bones to fuse. They usually stay on for 4 to 8 weeks. The length of time will be decided by your doctor. It is very important that you take good care of your cast.

Useful advice for cast management and care at home:

- Keep the affected limb raised on a soft surface, such as a pillow, for the first few days. This will allow the swelling to reduce and prevent the cast from getting tight. Try not to let the limb hang down for long periods of time, as this can increase swelling.
- Do not get the plaster cast wet or dirty. This will weaken it and affect the healing of wounds inside.
- Casts can become itchy, as casts can create a sweaty environment. Do not push anything in the cast to scratch with. This can cause skin damage, resulting in infections or pressure sores. If itching is getting really difficult to resist, your child can have an antihistamine (follow the instructions on the packet), or use a fan to keep the area cool.
- You will be advised if your child can stand or walk on the plaster cast. If so, you must wear a plaster shoe at all times when mobilising, for safety reasons.
- Do not cut the cast at home, or try to change the position.
- Exercise the joints that are not covered by the cast, such as the elbow, knee, fingers or toes. Do this often to help maintain circulation, and reduce stiffness.
- Take painkillers when needed (nurses will advise on weaning or administration before your child is sent home. Please follow pharmacy instructions for any medicine).
- You can buy covers for the casts for use in the shower, or to protect from the rain. Do not leave the cover on for long periods, as it can create a sweaty atmosphere inside the cast.
- Make sure that all supportive equipment (such as crutches or slings) are used. Your child will be shown how to use them before they are discharged.
- Most young people or children can return to school with a cast. However, please discuss with the school, and create a plan in advance if possible, making sure all safety measures are in place. Things to consider when returning to school include how you travel to and from school, moving around (including stairs), carrying of a school bag, using crutches or a wheelchair in an emergency. It might be helpful to discuss how to maintain education during this time, for example home-schooling if needed.
- It is important not to do any physical activities until your child's surgeon says they can.

Possible complications

- Contact the orthopaedic team or nearest Emergency Department (A&E) (details at the end of this leaflet), if you have any of these complications:
- Coldness of the fingers/toes, or a change of colour to white/blue, which is different to the non-casted limb.
- Pins and needles or numbness.
- Increase in pain which does not settle with basic painkillers.
- If you cannot move your fingers or toes.
- If the fingers/toes or affected limb become swollen despite continued elevation.
- If your cast gets broken, wet, cracked, tight or loose.
- The skin underneath or around the cast becomes sore.
- If you get an object stuck inside.
- If there is an unpleasant smell or oozing from the cast, as this might be an infection.
- A rash, swelling, excessive itching, an unpleasant smell, painful rubbing or discomfort. This might be a rare allergic reaction to the materials used.

Useful sources of information

NHS [website](http://www.nhs.uk): www.nhs.uk and search 'plaster cast care'.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your cast, please contact the team: Orthopaedic nurse specialist, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Call the hospital switchboard, **tel:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask for bleep number 3129 and wait for a response. This will connect you to the member of staff directly.

Alternatively, call Savannah Ward, **tel:** 020 7188 5941 or **tel:** 020 7188 9204 (24 hours a day, every day).

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **tel:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm, **email:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

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