

Care and management of a plaster or fibreglass cast

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

What are plaster casts and why do I have one?

Your recent orthopaedic surgery or injury will have required the application of a plaster or fibreglass cast. Casts are made up of bandage and padding, with a hard durable covering. They allow for the damaged limb to maintain a position, ensuring the surgery has time to heal, or to allow the broken bone(s) to fuse. They usually remain on for four to eight weeks – the length of time will be decided by your orthopaedic 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 initial swelling to reduce and prevent the cast becoming 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 within.
- 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 persists and is becoming problematic, it may be beneficial to consider an antihistamine or the use of fan therapy to keep the area cool.
- You will be advised if your child is able to 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 attempt to alter 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 pain killers when needed (nurses will advise on weaning or administration before you are sent home. Please follow pharmacy instructions for the administration of any medication).
- 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.
- Ensure all supportive equipment (such as crutches or slings) are used, which will be demonstrated to you before discharge.

- Most young people or children can return to school with a cast. However, please discuss with your school, and create a plan in advance when possible, ensuring all safety measures are in place. Things to consider when returning to school may 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 may be helpful to discuss how to maintain education during this time, for example home-schooling if needed.
- It is important not to partake in any physical activities until instructed by your surgeon.

Possible complications

Contact your paediatric orthopaedic team or local Emergency Department (A&E) (numbers at the end of this leaflet), if you have any of the following 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 pain killers.
- If you are unable to 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 may suggest an infection.
- On occasion an allergic reaction or pressure sore can occur, due to the materials used. Look for a rash, swelling, excessive itching, an unpleasant smell, painful rubbing or discomfort.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk. Search 'How should I care for my plaster cast?'

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your cast, please contact:
Savannah Ward paediatric orthopaedics on **t:** 020 7188 5941 or **t:** 020 7188 9204
(24 hours a day, throughout the year).

For re-enforcement, mobility or cast breakdown queries, please contact: paediatric orthopaedic physiotherapy on **t:** 020 7188 4660 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For paediatric orthopaedic nursing queries, such as wound or dressing concerns, please contact paediatric orthopaedic clinical nurse specialist (CNS)) on bleep 0472 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), or the deputy CNS on bleep 3129 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). To bleep someone, please **t:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Give them the bleep number and wait for a response. This will connect you to the member of staff directly.

For trauma patients (where surgery is not pre-planned) the Fracture Clinic are contactable on **t:** 020 7188 0046 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

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.

t: 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday **e:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership