

# Looking after your cast after a skin graft or plastic surgery

Department of Plastic Surgery

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: November 2023

Next review: November 2026

Leaflet number: 860 Version: 4

## Introduction

After your surgery you may have had a cast put on to protect your skin graft. This is to stay in place until your first dressing change, usually a week after your operation. A follow-up appointment will either be given to you before discharge or sent in the post by letter.

If you have any pain, swelling or discomfort from the cast once you are home, please contact the ward you were on, or contact the Burns and Plastics Dressing Clinic (BPDC) on the numbers below

## Contact numbers

**Burns and Plastics Dressing Clinic (BPDC):** 0116 258 5328

Monday to Friday 8:00 am to 3:00 pm

**Ward 9/ Triage:** 0116 258 5375

**Kinmonth Unit:** 0116 258 5327

**Ambulatory Unit (ASU):** 0116 258 5164/ 5163

## Looking after yourself

After the cast is put on it is very important to raise the limb to help ease swelling. Try to raise the lower limb using a stool with pillows. It should be about a foot higher than the hip for about 20 to 30 minutes every 1 to 2 hours until the swelling has gone down. Always remember to keep the heel free to prevent any extra pressure. This may cause pressure damage. If the upper limb is in plaster the use of a sling may be recommended.

**Remember:** swelling will be expected after surgery. Swelling can come and go during the recovery period and may take a few months to settle.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

Swelling can also cause pins and needles to the affected limb. Again raising your limb can help with this.

Remember to exercise all joints that are not in plaster on the injured arm or leg to prevent stiffness and reduce swelling, especially:

- Shoulders, fingers and elbows if the arm is in plaster.
- Knees, hips and toes if the leg is in plaster.

## Pain relief

Always take regular medication to help with pain especially in the first couple of weeks. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the recommended medication if you can take them. Take as directed on the packet.

## Bathing and showering

Leaflets for waterproof cast protectors are available from the hospital. Please ask a member of staff. Do not use carrier bags or cling film to cover the cast as these can split and leak.

Do not get the wound wet in the first week.

## Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) advice

Deep vein thrombosis is a blood clot in a vein. You will be given more information about the risks of developing a DVT but please speak to staff if you have any concerns. You should have been given a leaflet : [Reducing the risk of blood clots when you go home](#), at your pre-assessment appointment, if not please ask the ward for a copy. Or try the website below [www.yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library/trustwide/351-reducing-the-risk-of-blood-clots-when-you-go-home](http://www.yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library/trustwide/351-reducing-the-risk-of-blood-clots-when-you-go-home)

## Care of the cast

At first a back slab plaster of Paris will be put on to allow for any immediate swelling. This plaster takes about 48 hours to dry so you need to keep this off any hard surfaces.

For lower limb wounds/skin grafts that need a plaster cast, they are not strong enough to put weight on. You should not walk on the affected limb. You should keep weight off this to avoid cracking/splitting the cast.

You should be given a plaster shoe to wear if you can apply weight. You will be told of this before discharge. This must be worn at all times when walking.

The cast should be kept dry.

**Do not** put any objects down the cast for scratching, including pens and knitting needles. This is due to the risk of them getting stuck and causing damage to your intact skin.



### Contact the clinic (BPDC) or your discharging ward if you have any of the following:

- Pain or cramp in the calf that does not go away.
- Sore areas under the cast.
- You get the cast wet.
- A burning sensation in the heel.
- A lot of swelling or pain that does not settle by raising the limb.
- The cast cracks, splits or becomes very loose.

### What to expect after having the cast taken off

- **Dry skin** – The skin will be dry so a good wash in the bath or shower and moisturiser will help.
- **Stiffness** – Your joint will be very stiff but this should get better within the first week. You will not be referred to physio unless the consultant or nurse feels this is necessary. You will be given some exercises to do at home.
- **Weakness** – Your limb may feel very weak out of plaster. This is due to the loss of muscle while in cast. If this is the case, this will improve as you build up the amount of activity you do.
- **Swelling** – Swelling will come and go during recovery and sometimes can take up to a few months to settle completely. Raise your limb to help with this.
- **Pins and needles and numbness** – This can come and go and will eventually settle down. If you have had surgery then this can take a bit longer to settle.
- **Pain** – Due to the stiffness and weakness in the limb you may find you get some pain and discomfort. Taking Paracetamol or Ibuprofen regularly will help to settle this.

**Please remember every patient and injury is different and your recovery time will also vary.**

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على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

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