

# Aftercare when your limb is in a plaster cast after surgery

Department of Orthopaedics

Information for Patients

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## Introduction

You have had surgery and a plaster cast has been put on your leg/arm. This leaflet contains information on how to care for the cast.

Below are details of your surgery:

Date you had your surgery:.....

Diagnosis:.....

Treatment:.....

.....

## Follow-up appointments

A follow-up appointment a letter will be sent to you by post.

**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)

## Looking after yourself:

After your surgery and your cast has been put on it is very important to raise the limb to help ease swelling.

Try to raise the leg using a stool with pillows, ideally your foot should be as high as your heart or “Toes level with nose” for about 20 to 30mins every 1 to 2 hours until swelling has settled down. Always remember to keep your heel free to prevent any extra pressure which may cause a sore.

If your arm is in plaster the use of a sling is recommended for the first couple of weeks.

**Remember:** Swelling and bruising is normal and must be expected after your surgery. This swelling will come and go during your recovery and may take 6 to 12 months to settle fully.

Excessive swelling can also cause pins and needles to the affected limb. Again keeping your limb raised can help with this.

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

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

## Pain relief:

Always take regular pain killers especially in the first couple of weeks.

Paracetamol is recommended if you can take them. Take as directed.

## Bathing and showering:

Leaflets for ordering a waterproof cast protector are available from the department. Please ask a member of staff.

We recommend **not** to use carrier bags or cling film to cover your cast as these can split and leak.

## Care for your cast:

After surgery, you may have had a cast applied with a soft part down the center to allow for any immediate swelling. This plaster takes approximately 48 hours to dry so you need to keep this off any hard surfaces.

Depending on your surgery you may be asked to return to have your cast reinforced in 2 to 14 days.

For leg injuries in a full cast, this plaster is not strong enough to walk on so you should not put any weight on this.

This cast takes approximately 48 to 72 hours to dry.

For leg injuries you will be told if you can put any weight through your foot and how much. If you can put weight on it you will be given a plaster shoe to wear.

## The cast should be kept dry.

**Do not** insert any objects down your cast including pens and knitting needles.

Contact the clinic if you have any of the following:

- Pain or cramp in the calf that doesn't stop, chest pain, difficulty breathing. (Out of hours please seek medical attention immediately. Call NHS 111 or go to the Emergency Department)
- Sore areas under the cast
- You get the cast wet
- A burning sensation in the heel
- Excessive swelling or pain that doesn't settle when raising it
- Your cast cracks, splits or becomes very loose

**You will need to make an appointment to come back to the fracture clinic.**

### **What to expect after the cast has been taken off**

**Dry skin:** Your skin will be dry so a good wash in the bath or shower and moisturiser will help.

**Sensitive scars:** Gently massage scar tissue with moisturiser, using your finger/thumb in a circular motion, 3 to 4 times a day, and every time you wash your skin. This desensitizes scar tissue .

**Stiffness:** Your joint will be very stiff but this should ease within the first week. You will not be referred to Physio unless the Consultant/Nurse feels this is necessary. You will be given some exercises to do at home.

**Weakness:** Your limb will feel very weak out of plaster. This is due to the loss of muscle while in cast. Again this will improve as you build up the amount of activity you are doing.

**Swelling:** Your limb may swell sometimes during your recovery and may take up to 6 to 12 months to settle completely. Raise it if it becomes tight or painful.

**Pins/needles/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 your limb you may find you get some pain and discomfort. Regular paracetamol and ibuprofen will help to settle this.

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

As a guide if you've been in cast for 4 to 6 weeks, then when your cast comes off it will take at least another 4 to 6 weeks to get back to anywhere near your fitness level before your injury. Also if you were in a lower limb cast your risk of developing a DVT (deep vein thrombosis) is up to 12 weeks after removal.

Any problems please speak to your GP.

## General advice

- Following surgery, you may have a different kind of support for your injury; strapping tape is applied to maintain position and provide support of toes and fingers, you may have a supportive splint applied to your foot or hand, or a walking boot instead of a cast. Check your skin regularly for sore areas if you are allowed to remove your splint. Check with plaster room if you are unsure (number is on the last page.)
- Healing starts on the first day of your surgery. Smaller bones heal quicker than longer bones. Your age has an effect on the healing time.
- Your general health and if you smoke also affects healing. It is advised to eat a healthy balanced diet which contains food rich in calcium and reduce or stop smoking.
- Depending on the type of injury you have will depend on the length of time it takes to heal. Most arm injuries take 4 to 6 weeks, whilst leg injuries take 4 to 12 weeks.

## Driving

Whilst in a cast or splint we strongly advise you not to drive. Your insurance will be invalid.

## Deep vein thrombosis advice

A blood clot in a vein is called a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). DVT is very dangerous. Get medical help as soon as possible if you think you have a DVT.

You will be given more information about the risks of developing blood clots. See leaflet 339 *Reducing the risk of blood clots when you go home.*

If you are planning a holiday abroad whilst in cast or splint please speak to your Consultant surgeon before booking. The risk of developing a blood clot is higher when you fly if you have had recent surgery and are in a cast or splint.

## Contact details

Hospital Switchboard: 0300 303 1573

Problems with your cast or surgery: 0116 258 4406

Leicester General Hospital Ward 14: 0116 258 4161

Leicester General Hospital Ward 16: 0116 258 8335

Leicester General Hospital Ward 18: 0116 258 4148

Glenfield Hospital Plaster Room (Clinic E) 0116 258 3335

Emergency department: 0116 258 5121 or 258 5122

Ambulance Bookings: 0345 2669662

## Opening hours

### Plaster Room:

Monday to Thursday 8:45am to 5:00pm

Friday 8:30am to 1:00pm

Closed Weekends and Bank Holidays

The Plaster Room is in Out Patients 1, Leicester General Hospital

If you have any questions, write them down here to remind you what to ask when you speak to your nurse or your consultant.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਸਿ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

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

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)