

Patient advice sheet

Advice for patients with a plaster cast

This information provides details on how to care for your cast, how to avoid pressure ulcers and further guidance about living with a plaster cast.

General care – ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’

Don’t:

- Get the plaster wet as it may disintegrate or cause irritation to the skin.
- Walk on your cast without a hospital supplied plaster shoe (unless advised otherwise by your healthcare professional).
- Rest the plastered leg on its heel for long periods of time. This can cause pressure area damage to your skin.
- Cut, heat or place any objects into the cast. This includes coins, tissues, knitting needles or rulers.

Do:

- Remove any rings before your cast is applied.
- Look after your cast.
- Keep all joints not enclosed in the cast moving freely. This includes fingers and toes.

When to seek help

Please call the plaster room

- If you experience a raised temperature, any localised heat in a specific area, burning pain, odour, discharge or staining of the cast.
- The cast becomes too tight or too loose, if it rubs, becomes soft, cracks or is broken.

There is a small risk of a decrease in blood flow to the affected limb due to your plaster cast which in a small number of cases can lead to a Deep Vein Thrombosis.

Seek immediate medical support if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Pain in your calf, thigh, or chest
- Sudden onset of shortness of breath with no physical exertion
- Your fingers or toes appear blue, white, swollen, painful, numb, cold or you continue to have pins and needles.

How to avoid pressure ulcers

Pressure ulcers can develop when pressure is applied to an area of skin over a period of time. The extra pressure disrupts the flow of blood through the skin which can result in an ulcer. Please follow the steps below to reduce that risk.

The risk of developing a pressure ulcer can be increased for people who are in a plaster cast or who are finding it difficult to move, especially those confined to lying in a bed or sitting for prolonged periods. To reduce risk, we advise the following:

- Regularly change your position. Turn at least every two hours.

- Ensure the top and bottom of the cast is not rubbing or leaving red marks
- Ensure all toes/fingers are able to move freely
- If you are in a leg cast and turning on your side, place a pillow inbetween the knees to prevent the cast rubbing on the other leg.
- Don't rest the leg on the heel for long periods and place a pillow under the cast.

Immediately return to the plaster room if you start feeling the following:

- Feeling a rubbing or blister-like pain or discomfort within the cast
- Complaining of something wet or sticky inside the plaster cast
- The plaster cast has developed a smell
- Staining has developed on the outside of the cast
- Areas of pain or local heat

Additional guidance

Driving

DO NOT drive while in a cast. As well as being dangerous, your insurance may not be valid.

Flying

Seek advice before flying. Many airlines require your cast to be split before you can fly.

Drying times

Plaster of Paris takes around 48 hours to dry, a synthetic cast takes 20-30 minutes.

Contact details

If you have any concerns regarding your treatment or injury, please contact:

- Stoke Mandeville Hospital Plaster room: **01296 315743** (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)
- Wycombe Hospital Plaster room: **01494 425452** (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)
- If you have concerns out of these hours, contact NHS 111 for advice.
- If it's an emergency call 999

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, in large print or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net