

### Plaster Care Fact Sheet

A plaster cast has been applied to hold the fractured arm or leg in place while the bone heals. On average the plaster cast stays on for about six weeks. This time is sometimes longer or shorter, depending on your age, general health and type of fracture. During this time an x-ray is done to check that the bone is healing well.

Fractures can be painful. The pain may be extreme in the beginning but will ease once the plaster is on and the limb is supported and rested. Simple painkillers, such as paracetamol are often needed during these few days. The plaster may also become itchy, this will ease over a few days.

This fact sheet explains how to care for your plaster cast or back slab at home.

1. While the plaster is drying
  - Keep away from direct heat.
  - Don't walk on the cast.
  - Don't rest it on hard surfaces.
2. The plaster cast supports and protects the fracture while the bone heals. However, the cast can sometimes cause circulation problems. To help prevent this:
  - In the case of an upper limb, exercise the fingers often
  - In the case of a lower limb, exercise the toes often.
  - Keep the plastered body part raised to prevent swelling. Try and place above the level of your heart especially for the first 48 hours. For example, use a sling to keep an arm raised, or place pillows when sitting or lying down. Use pillows under your leg to elevate when resting. Use walking aides as instructed.
3. Caring for your plaster. The plaster is important, as it keeps the fracture in an acceptable position. Suggestions include:
  - Rest for 48 hours once the plaster has been applied to allow it to set completely.
  - **Keep the plaster dry.** Put a plastic bag over the plaster and seal with a rubber band or tape when having a shower or bath. Keep plaster out of the rain.
  - Don't stick objects down the plaster, as this will damage the skin.
  - Don't cut or interfere with the cast.
  - Don't walk on the plaster unless instructed by your doctor. It is better to use crutches.
  - Don't lift anything or drive until the fracture is healed.

You should see your doctor if:

- Pain despite taking painkillers regularly.
- Fingers or toes of the affected limb that go white or blue, have pins and needles or numbness
- Fingers or toes that won't move or pain on movement.
- A consistently painful area under the cast.
- Liquid staining the plaster e.g. yellow or green liquid oozing through the plaster.
- Offensive or putrid smelling plaster.
- The cast becomes loose, cracked or soft or is no longer keeping the injured body part immobilised.