

Advice following removal of plaster casts or splints

Information for patients Virtual Fracture Care Team: Shared Care Plan

Orthopaedic Department
Tunbridge Wells Hospital
Tonbridge Road
Pembury
TN2 4QJ
Telephone: 01892 638450
Email: mtw-tr.fracturecare@nhs.net

This is an information leaflet for patients who have been advised that they need to remove a plaster cast or splint themselves at home. You should have been advised by a member of the Virtual Fracture Clinic Team when it is safe for you to remove your plaster cast or splint (if you are unsure, please call the number at the top of this page). If you have been provided with a 'soft cast' these are designed to be removed by unravelling the bandage. A plaster technician will have shown you how to do this at the time of fitting.

Once you have removed your 'soft cast' or 'splint', there are a number of normal sensations you will experience:-

Pain

Firstly, you may feel pain as soon as you begin to move the joint and surrounding joints that have not been moved whilst in the cast / splint. This is because the soft tissues have not been stretched for a number of days or weeks. This increased pain is normal and will settle over time and with repeated movement. It is therefore advised, that you begin the exercise programme provided within the limits of your pain. You may need to take some pain relief to allow you to move more comfortably. Please seek guidance from your GP or Pharmacist if you are unsure of the type of pain relief to take.

Reduced movement and stiffness

Joints, muscle, tendons and ligaments are designed to move regularly. When they are kept in one position with no movement, they become stiff. You may notice you have reduced movement in the joints around the area that was injured. You may also experience a feeling of tightness and stiffness when you start to move the joints again. This is very common following a fracture (broken bone) or sprain and will improve over time. The exercise programme provided will help improve the available movement at the joints and also help reduce the feeling of stiffness. However, you may never regain the full movement you had at the joint before it was injured.

Weakness

When muscles and tendons are kept in one position and not moved, they begin to weaken immediately. You may notice that you do not have as much muscle bulk around the area of your injury that you had prior to being placed in the plaster cast or splint. You may also feel that you are lacking in strength and are unable to lift simple things like mugs and pans. If your leg was in a plaster cast or splint, you may find walking up and down the stairs more difficult than prior to your injury. Again, this is normal and will improve over time. The exercise programme provided will help strengthen the muscles and tendons over a period of six to twelve weeks.

Appearance, bruising and swelling

It is common to see a change in the way your arm or leg looks following a fracture or sprain. It may look larger in areas; you may also see lumps or bumps over the area affected or there may still be some bruising or swelling present. When a bone breaks, it is normal for it to heal slightly differently to its original shape.

Bruising and swelling can take many weeks to settle down, but the exercise programme provided will help reduce the bruising and swelling by increasing the blood flow to the area and helping to clear excess fluid. Regular elevation of the limb can also help reduce swelling.

Flaky skin over the area that was in the cast or splint is also normal and can be helped by soaking the area in warm water for 5 minutes, followed by applying a moisturiser two to three times a day.


Timeframes

By three months following the date of your injury you should be able to manage most daily activities. However, remodelling of the bone and soft tissue will continue for around twelve months.

Further information and advice can be obtained from:

NHS 111



NHS Choices online

 111

www.nhs.uk

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the [Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\)](#) on:

Telephone:  01622 224960 or  01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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