



## **Plaster Care Information**

A broken bone is a common event. Given time and the right care, the bone is able to heal itself. A plaster cast is applied to hold the arm or leg fracture in place while the bone heals.

On average, plaster casts stay on for about 6 weeks. This is sometimes longer or shorter, depending on your age, general health and type of fracture. During this time, x-rays are done to check that the bone is healing well. If there are problems with the type of fracture or the way in which the fracture is healing, you may be referred to an orthopaedic surgeon (bone doctor).

### **Pain and itchiness**

- Fractures can be painful. The pain can be extreme at the beginning but it will ease when the plaster is on and the fractured limb is supported and rested.
- The pain will settle even further over the next few weeks
- Simple painkillers, such as paracetamol, are often needed. Check the packet for instructions.
- The plaster may cause itchiness for a few days, but this should ease

### **Caring for the fracture**

- 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 plaster cast, move the fingers often
  - In the case of a lower limb plaster cast, move the toes often
- Keep the plastered body part raised to prevent swelling, especially for the first 48 hours. For example, use a sling to keep an arm raised, or place pillows under your leg.

### **Caring for the plaster**

- Rest for a couple of days once the plaster is applied to allow it to set completely.
- Try to keep the 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. It is better to use crutches instead.
  - For plaster-of-paris casts: Keep the plaster dry. Put a plastic bag over the plaster and seal with a rubber band when having a shower or bath.
  - For fiberglass waterproof casts - getting it wet in the shower is fine, allow the water to run out of in. A cool hairdryer can be used to circulate air into the cast to help the skin dry

**Seek urgent medical help - You should see your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency department straight away if you have:**

- Pain despite taking painkillers
- Fingers or toes of the affected limb that go white or blue
- Fingers or toes that won't move
- Pain on moving your fingers or toes
- Numbness or pins and needles
- Any concerns about your plaster cast.

**Once the plaster is removed, common issues include:**

- Stiffness and weakness in the limb. This should improve as you go about your normal activities.
- Sometimes physiotherapy is needed to help you recover. Physiotherapy involves exercises to improve muscle strength, joint mobility and balance. These exercises help you to safely return to normal activities.
- The bone is still healing so you should take care for at least another month.
- You may feel a lump at the site of the fracture. This is the new bone, which will eventually take on the shape of your original bone.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Orthopaedic surgeon
- Physiotherapist

**Things to remember**

- Keep the plastered body part raised to prevent swelling, especially for the first 48 hours.
- On average, plaster casts stay on for about six weeks, depending on your age, general health and type of fracture.
- Even once the plaster is removed, the bone is still healing so you should take care for at least another month. Call your physiotherapist to arrange a followup appointment to start your rehabilitation.

*(Note: Information taken from <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/> website)*