

## Information for patients in plaster casts

A plaster cast has been put on your arm or leg to prevent movement of the broken bone while it is healing.

Always follow the advice of your doctor, nurse, physiotherapist or plaster technician while in a cast.

### How to care for your arm or leg in plaster:

- **Do** take regular pain relief.
- **Do** keep the joints outside your cast moving. This will prevent stiffness and help reduce swelling.
- **Do** elevate your arm or leg. This will help prevent swelling.
- **Do** use crutches if you have been instructed to do so. This will help with balance and protect your affected leg.
- **Do** contact your insurance company and get advice from your doctor before driving.
- **Do** take advice before flying and ask the fracture clinic to split your cast. Let the airline know about your condition.
  
- **Do not** put pressure on your cast until it is fully dry
- **Do not** allow your cast to get wet. There are commercial products you can buy to protect you and your cast while washing. The plaster room has leaflets to guide you.
- **Do not** put or push anything inside the cast. This can cause skin damage and risk infection.

- **Do not** cut or remove your cast. If your cast is causing discomfort contact the fracture clinic and we will assist you.
- **Do not** wear rings or jewellery on the affected hand or foot. This can cause problems to circulation as your limb can swell at times.

### Contact us immediately if:

- Your fingers turn white or blue and feel cold to touch
- You experience pins and needles, numbness or worsening pain
- Your leg or arm swells despite proper elevation
- Your fingers or toes become weak or difficult to move
- You develop new onset calf pain inside your cast
- You experience shortness of breath or sudden chest pain
- There is wetness, oozing or a bad odour under the cast
- You get an object stuck in the cast or it becomes damaged

### Lower limb plaster and blood clot (thrombosis) risk

One of the rare complications of a plaster cast is the development of blood clots in the veins (deep vein thrombosis or DVT) or in the lungs (pulmonary embolus or PE).

We want to try to reduce the risk of blood clots. Blood clots in the veins can cause skin discoloration, skin ulcers and lead to long-term problems in the leg veins. Blood clots in the lungs can be very serious. They can cause breathing problems and in rare cases be fatal.

### Most common symptoms of DVT

Some or all of the following:

- Pain, swelling and tenderness in one leg, which may only affect the calf
- Redness of the leg

### Most common symptoms of PE

Some or all of the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain made worse by deep breathing
- Dry cough (or occasionally coughing up blood)

If you experience any of the above symptoms please inform the nurse/doctor immediately whilst you are an in-patient. If you are at home seek urgent medical advice from your GP or attend the emergency department (ED) of your nearest hospital.

### What to do to reduce the risk of developing blood clots

- Keep mobile and active. Move around as much as possible and follow the advice given to you in the fracture clinic.
- Keep well hydrated. Try to drink between 1.5-2 litres of fluid daily (unless told otherwise).
- If you need to travel on a long journey try to move your legs regularly. Take regular breaks and walk around every one to two hours.
- Talk to your GP if you are taking the contraceptive pill. Some of these may increase your risk of developing a blood clot. You may be advised to stop taking them while you have a lower limb

cast. If so, please ensure you use alternative contraceptive methods.

### Further information is available from:

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)
- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) [www.sign.ac.uk](http://www.sign.ac.uk)
- Department of Health [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

### Who to contact

During working hours, Monday-Friday, contact:

- Barnet Hospital plaster room 020 8216 5728
- Royal Free Hospital plaster room 020 7794 0500  
Ext 34043

Out of hours/weekends, contact:

- Barnet Hospital ED reception 020 8216 5003/5004
- Royal Free Hospital ED reception 020 7830 2100