

# When You Come Out of Plaster: Upper Limb (Arm)

## Summary Points to Remember

- Swelling, pain and stiffness are normal after removal of plaster cast
- It is safe to start using your arm again – your physiotherapist will let you know how much weight is safe to lift

## Skin Care

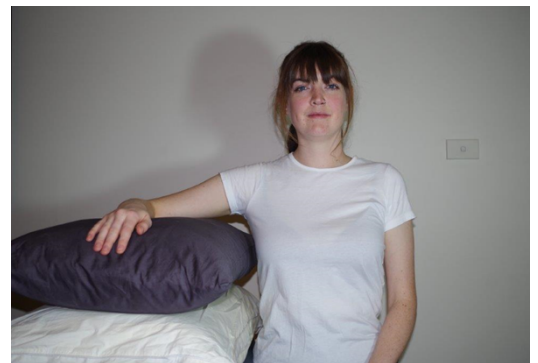
- The skin that was under the plaster cast will likely be dry and flaky for a few days – this is normal. Wash your arm with mild soap and warm water
- Massage your whole arm with moisturiser (e.g. sorbolene, vitamin E cream or olive oil) morning and night to help with circulation and pain sensitivity
- Keep any wound dressings clean and dry.

## Pain

- It is normal to have some pain when starting to use your arm again
- If pain is bothering you, medications such as paracetamol or anti-inflammatories can help. Speak to your local doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medication
- Gentle movement, and using a warm or cold pack may help.

## Swelling

- Swelling can cause pain, pins and needles, or numbness
- To improve swelling:
  - Elevate your arm regularly above your heart using 2 – 3 pillows under the elbow as pictured
  - Open and close your fingers to assist with fluid movement
  - Apply an ice pack for 20 minutes 3 – 4 times per day as required
  - In some cases an elastic compression bandage and/or a sling may help
- If your symptoms do not ease using the above techniques seek further advice from your treating physiotherapist or local doctor.



## Joint Stiffness

- It is normal for a joint to be stiff after wearing a plaster cast
- Gentle movement, exercise and warmth can help
- Your physiotherapist will give you exercises to assist in improving your movement.

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## Muscle Wasting

- It is normal for muscle size and strength to decrease after wearing a plaster cast – your arm may feel weak
- Your physiotherapist will give you exercises to assist you in improving your strength when safe to do so.

## Wrist Splint

- You may be fitted with a wrist splint after the removal of your plaster cast
- The splint is for comfort only and can be ceased once your pain improves
- Remove the splint for hygiene and for your exercises.

## Expected Return To Daily Activities

- Once the fracture has healed (i.e. simple fracture 6 weeks) it may take a week or more before you feel comfortable using the arm in your usual activities – start with light tasks like using a knife and fork, or brushing your hair, and progress to heavier things like folding washing or preparing a meal as you get stronger
- **Return to driving**
  - You are not allowed to use your injured arm to drive while still in plaster or a splint
  - Ask your doctor or physiotherapist when it is safe to drive – they will check if you are safe by testing your movement and strength
  - Discuss any concerns with your doctor and/or insurance company
- **Return to work**
  - Most people are able to return to work on light or modified duties while their injury is healing
  - Speak to your local doctor and your employer about a return to work plan
- **Return to sport**
  - Speak with your physiotherapist about a guided return to sport program.

### Contact

Physiotherapy

Allied Health

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### Practitioner / Patient notes

Physiotherapy Department | iPolicy Number AHPT02.05D | Physiotherapy Outpatient Team Leader | June 2021



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