

Caring for your arm in a plaster cast

Your arm has been given a plaster cast to prevent it from moving while your fracture (broken bone) heals.

Take good care of your plaster cast

A plaster cast of fibre glass takes 1 hour to dry. A plaster cast of lime plaster takes 24 hours to dry. With this in mind, you need to exhibit particular care during the first 24 hours and avoid physical impact.

You must also take care not to get the plaster wet. To prevent it from getting wet, pull a plastic bag over the plaster when you take a bath or a shower and close the end of the bag with sticky tape to prevent water from entering.

You might also experience itching under the plaster. If you do, you can scratch yourself with a cotton swab or something similar but not with a sharp object. Do not use a pointed object such as a knitting needle.

In cases where K-threads are inserted, do not use a cotton swab, as you may push on it or infection may occur around the K-thread.

Keep the injured arm raised and do exercises

Do as follows to prevent your fingers or wrist from swelling and your joints from becoming stiff:

1. Keep your hand raised as much as you can

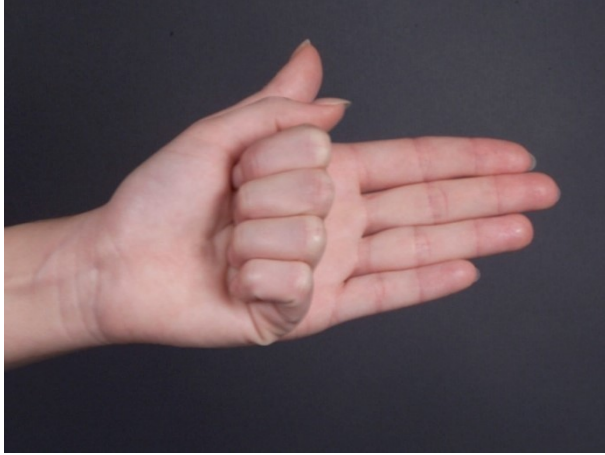
You should keep your hand elevated for as long as possible, which means above your heart. When sitting or lying down you should keep your arm elevated by placing it on pillows or resting your elbow on an armrest. This will help prevent your fingers or wrist from swelling and reduce any swelling that you might experience. Do this for as long as your hand tends to swell.

2. Do pumping exercises

Clench your fist by tightening your muscles and then stretch your fingers again (see image).

Do this exercise slowly for about 5 minutes once per hour all through the day until your hand no longer tends to swell.

If your hand is very swollen, you might benefit from doing the exercise with your arm stretched, unless the plaster cast prevents this.



3. Move your elbow and shoulder as you would normally do

With the arm in a cast, the joints easily stiffen. In order to prevent this, it is critical that you move your elbow and also your shoulder as you would normally do.

Take painkillers as required

Experiencing pains is normal when you have a broken (fractured) arm. The pain will gradually decline although this might take months. To relieve the pains, you can take over-the-counter painkillers.

Contact us if you experience issues

Contact us if you experience following:

- The cast is tight or becomes too loose.
- Your fingers become severely swollen or pale and cold.
- Your fingers become tingly or numb or you experience loss of sensibility.
- Your pains are strong and increasing.

It is quite normal for the fingers to become slightly discoloured to begin with.

If the elastic bandage used to secure the cast becomes either too loose or too tight, you should contact the emergency ward (Skadeklinikken) or the Outpatient Clinic for Hand Surgery (Håndkirurgisk Ambulatorium) at Aalborg Universitetshospital, Farsø, and ask them to adjust the cast.

Removal of the cast

How long you need to wear the cast depends on the fracture of your arm. We will contact you when the time has come to have the cast removed and to check your arm. You will be notified either by digital post or a letter in the post.

Appearance after removal of the cast

When an arm has been protected by a cast for an extended period of time, it might look slightly different from its healthy counterpart.

- **Skin.** The skin will typically look more pale since it has not been exposed to the light. For the same reason, the skin might also be more delicate and wrinkled than usual.
- **Hair.** It is not unusual either if hair growing under the cast is different. Usually, it will have grown slightly more than on the opposite side. This will return to its usual self within a short while.
- **Muscles.** Often the hand with the cast will be thinner and weaker than the hand on the opposite side. The reason for this is that you have not used these muscles while wearing the cast.
- **Joints.** Joints which have been immobilised because the cast prevented you from your using them. Joints will be sore and stiff once the cast is removed. It will take some time before they reach their full mobility and you will need to be patient.

Contact and more information

Please contact bed ward O4, if you experience any issues with your arm within the first 24 hours. After this period, you will need to contact the Outpatient Clinic for Hand Surgery (Håndkirurgisk Ambulatorium).

You can find more information in Danish about how broken bones (fractures) are treated with plaster casts if you look up "gipsbehandling" in the Patient's Handbook at www.patienthaandbogen.dk



Department of Orthopedic Surgery

Outpatient Clinic for Hand Surgery

Phone. (0045) 97 65 30 30

Contact hours: Monday – Friday 8.00 – 15.00

Bed ward O4

Phone. (0045) 97 65 30 50

Contact hours: Monday – Friday 8.00 – 15.00



EXERCISE 1

- Form an O by touching the tips of the 4 other fingers with your thumb. Take turns with the index finger, middle finger, ring finger and pinky finger.
- Stretch your thumb as long back as possible after each O.
- Relax.
- Repeat this exercise for a total of 5 times.



EXERCISE 2

- Position your lower arm on a tabletop or an armrest.
- Move your thumb to the base of your pinky finger – or as far as possible to this position.
- Hold this position while counting to 3.
- Then extend your thumb as much as possible from your hand (as if you are hitch hiking).
- Do this 10 times.
- Take a break.