

Plaster care

Useful guidelines for your child's recovery at home

Your child's plaster cast

Your child will go home from the hospital in a plaster cast. Looking after your child's plaster correctly is very important. The reason for the plaster is to keep your child's limb in the right position and to protect the injured area whilst healing occurs.

Elevation

In the first few days following hospital discharge, keep your child's injured limb raised above the level of their heart as much as possible and encourage your child to move their fingers or toes regularly. This will help to reduce the chance of further swelling and assist with pain relief. Encourage plenty of rest in the first few days at home.

Arm in cast: If your child has been given a sling, always use it to support the arm and keep it up when your child is moving about. Rest the arm on pillows when your child is sitting or lying down.

Leg in cast: Raise the leg on pillows (ensuring heel is over the edge of the pillows) when resting and use crutches, a wheelchair or walking aids as instructed. If using crutches, make sure your child has been taught how to use them safely, including going up and down stairs.

Skin care

It is common for the skin under the cast to get itchy. Don't put anything between the cast and the skin (i.e. do not use a ruler to scratch the skin under the cast). This can irritate the skin and cause an infection. Do not use lotions, powders or oils under or around the cast. Check your child's skin each day for any areas that seem irritated or uncomfortable.

Care of the cast

Keep the plaster cast clean and dry at all times. When bathing, make sure that the plaster is totally protected with a plastic bag and well-sealed at the top with tape. The cast usually dries thoroughly in 48 hours. Allow it to dry naturally and keep it away from direct heat. Avoid bumping or hitting the cast.

Circulation

Check for COLOUR, WARMTH, SENSATION AND MOVEMENT. Your child's fingers or toes should be pink and warm to touch. Any pins and needles or numbness should gradually reduce and they should be able to move their fingers or toes. If any of these change, rest and raise the limb *above the level of the heart*.

Swelling

Slight swelling of the fingers or toes may occur. Check the plaster at both ends to make sure that it is not too tight. If it appears swollen, rest and raise the limb above the level of the heart and encourage your child to move their fingers or toes.

Pain

Pain in the area of the fracture or operation site is quite normal for the first few days. Your child should be able to fully bend and stretch their fingers or toes without excessive pain.

Medications

- If your surgeon has prescribed antibiotics, be sure to finish the entire course
- You can give your child paracetamol for one to two days if needed (ensure you follow correct dosage instructions for your child's age)
- Paracetamol can be given every four to six hours but no more than four times in a 24 hour period
- Do not take aspirin

Follow-up

Please contact your surgeon's rooms to organise a follow-up appointment, if you don't already have one. They will advise if you need an x-ray prior to your appointment.

When to contact your surgeon

Please contact your surgeon if your child has:

- A persistent temperature of 38.5°C or higher
- Strong pain unrelieved by regular pain relief
- Wet or damaged plaster with a bad smell coming from the cast
- Develops numbness in the affected limb
- Poor blood supply or swelling in the fingers or toes:
 - Loss of sensation
 - Cool or very hot to touch
 - Dusky or grey in colour
 - Unable to move fingers or toes

A note before you leave the hospital

Please report to the reception desk in the foyer of the hospital before leaving to finalise any administrative paperwork.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact your discharge ward on the number below.

Cabrini Malvern Paediatric Ward
183 Wattletree Road, Malvern VIC 3144
03 9508 1378

Cabrini Brighton Paediatric Ward
243 New Street, Brighton VIC 3186
03 9508 5888

