

## Hand therapy department

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# Advice for patients with a fractured wrist in a plaster cast

This information sheet has been given to you to provide you with some useful advice while your wrist is immobilised in a plaster cast. Following the advice in this leaflet and performing the exercises shown will help your fracture to heal properly and prevent the unaffected joints in your hand and arm from becoming stiff.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your hand therapist.

### Why has my wrist been put in a plaster cast?

Your fractured (broken) wrist has been placed in a plaster cast to make sure that the wrist is kept still while the fracture heals. The plaster cast will stay on for up to six weeks. Once the plaster cast has been taken off, your wrist will need another six weeks to become fully strong.

### While your wrist is in the plaster cast

- **Keep the injured arm raised up** with your hand above your elbow as much as possible, especially for the first week.
- Avoid standing or sitting with your hand down by your side. If you can, you should place the affected hand on the opposite shoulder whenever you are standing. When sitting you can place your arm on several pillows. At night, you can rest the arm on two pillows to keep it elevated. This helps to reduce swelling in the arm and prevent the plaster from becoming too tight.
- **Move the unaffected joints.** You should be able to move your fingers fully when in the plaster cast.
- **Perform the exercises** on the attached sheet four times a day
- **Use your affected hand for light activities only.**

**Please return to Accident and Emergency (A&E) immediately if you are affected by any of the following:**

- increased pain
- increased swelling
- numbness or pins and needles in the affected arm
- inability to move your fingers
- blueness of the fingers
- if the plaster cracks, becomes loose or is rubbing your skin.

## Do not:

- × **Do not rest** on the plaster or put anything heavy on the plaster for the first 48 hours, to ensure the plaster has fully dried. Once the plaster has fully dried you should still avoid putting anything heavy on it.
- × **Do not cut** your plaster – always come back to A&E if your plaster needs trimming.
- × **Do not wet** the plaster. Cover the plaster with a plastic bag or cover when in the bath or shower.
- × **Do not poke** anything down the plaster as you may cut your skin or cause a wound to become infected.

## Exercises

### Why should I do these exercises?

These exercises are important, as they will make sure your unaffected joints do not become stiff and will help maintain good circulation in your arm, which will help with fracture healing.

**Try to do these exercises four times each day.**

#### 1. Shoulder flexion

Standing or sitting in an upright position, slowly lift your affected arm up towards the ceiling (elbow straight) and then lower again. Repeat 5 times.

#### 2. Elbow flexion and extension

Sitting in an upright position, slowly bend your affected elbow so your hand moves towards your shoulder and then fully straighten your elbow. Repeat 5 times.

#### 3. Finger flexion and extension

Place the elbow of your affected arm on the table with your fingers pointing towards the ceiling (as shown below).



- A.** Start with all your fingers straight and then bend all your fingers to make a fist.

**Repeat 5 times.**



- B.** Start with all your fingers straight and then bend the knuckle joints of all your fingers, keeping the fingers straight.

**Repeat 5 times.**



- C.** Bend the joints of your fingers whilst keeping your knuckle joints straight, forming a 'hook' position and then straighten the fingers.

**Repeat 5 times.**

#### **4. Thumb flexion, extension and opposition**

Place the elbow of your affected arm on the table with your fingers pointing towards the ceiling.



- A.** Touch the tip of each finger with your thumb.

**Repeat 5 times.**



- B.** Move your thumb towards the base of your little finger and then fully straighten the thumb.

**Repeat 5 times.**

## **Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about your wrist fracture or having a plaster cast, please contact the **Accident & Emergency department (A&E) on 020 7188 8899**

## Useful sources of information

### Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

### Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

**NHS Direct** – Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 0845 4647 **w:** [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk) or visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)