

# Physiotherapy information for wearing slings

This leaflet explains more about returning to your everyday activities after your arm injury or operation.

## Slings

After your injury or operation you may be wearing a sling (see picture). Wearing the sling rests your arm, protects your arm injury and may help to reduce any pain. Your doctor will tell you how long you should wear the sling. You will be shown by a member of the physiotherapy team how to wear the sling before you leave hospital.



## Pain management

After your injury or operation you may experience some pain in some or all of your arm. We recommend you take the advised pain relief to manage this.

## Posture

It is important to maintain correct posture whilst wearing your sling as this may help to decrease your pain. Try to avoid slumping or rounding your shoulders when you are standing and sitting, as this can increase the stress placed on your shoulder.

## Exercises

Your physiotherapist will advise you on exercises you should do that are specific to you and your injury. These exercises may include moving uninjured joints in your arm.

It is recommended that you do neck exercises to avoid your neck becoming stiff while wearing the sling. These exercises involve moving your neck in all directions.

- up and down
- left and right (by looking over each shoulder)
- side to side (by ear to shoulder movements).

## Sleeping

It is important you wear your sling in bed for the recommended period, unless you are instructed otherwise.

We recommend you sleep on your back or unaffected side. When lying on your back we suggest you use a pillow underneath your injured arm for support.

When lying on your unaffected side, we suggest you use a pillow underneath your injured arm for support, and also behind your back to prevent you from rolling onto your injured arm in the night.

## Getting washed

If you have had any dressings or bandages applied it is important for them to stay dry when washing.

You can remove your sling when bathing or showering but it is important to keep your arm close to your body to limit the movement. If you are having a strip wash, we recommend you rest your injured arm on a table whilst you wash.

Ensure your skin is dry, especially under your armpit, as this will prevent skin irritation.

You may require some assistance to wash and dress your unaffected arm.

## Getting dressed

While you are wearing the sling, we recommend you wear loose-fitting or front-opening clothes, such as a shirt or blouse, as they are easier to get on and off. Make sure you put your injured arm into your clothes first (see pictures below). Once you have dressed your upper body remember to place your arm back into the sling.



## Risks

Wearing a sling continuously can increase the risk of joint stiffness. However, your physiotherapist will advise you of exercises you can do to reduce joint stiffness.

After an injury or operation you could suffer from an infection (when your body cannot fight germs). Please contact your GP or nearest A&E department as soon as possible, if:

- your wound begins to seep fluid or becomes red, hot or inflamed
- your pain seems to be getting worse
- you have a fever (temperature higher than 37.5°C).

## Will I have a follow-up appointment after my arm injury or operation?

You will need a follow-up appointment in the Fracture Clinic. The doctors will review you before you are discharged from hospital and they will tell you when to expect this appointment. You will also be told if you need any other appointments before you leave the hospital. The details of these appointments will be posted to you.

If you do not receive notification of your appointment within six to eight weeks, please contact your GP who can look into the matter for you.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your arm injury or operation, please contact **George Perkins Ward** on **020 7188 2670** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), and ask to speak to the nurse in charge.

If you have any concerns outside of these hours, please contact your GP or your nearest emergency department (A&E).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111      **w:** [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk)

### NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets), or **e:** [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)

Leaflet number: 4215/VER2

Date published: March 2019

Review date: March 2022

© 2019 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

A list of sources is available on request