

Care of your arm & hand while in a wrist cast

Whakangungu mō tō ringa ina kei tētahi tākai ukutea

Your wrist has been put in a cast to stop it moving. This is so your bones can heal properly in a good position.

Because of your injury, your arm might:

- swell
- become stiff and weak.

People usually need to have their cast on for six weeks. You'll be able to begin using your arm normally once your cast is taken off, but it may be up to three months before you can return to heavy activity or sports.

If either:

- your pain or swelling gets worse or
- you lose feeling or movement in your fingers or thumb

contact the place you had your cast put on or your general practice team as soon as possible.



Things you can do with your arm

You can do some light activities with your arm such as eating, writing, typing, dressing yourself, using your cellphone and folding laundry.

You can shower with your cast on, but you need to keep it dry. Avoid getting the cast wet by wrapping your arm in a plastic bag whenever you're in contact with water.

You shouldn't grip strongly or lift heavy things with an arm that's in a cast. Don't stick objects down inside your cast.

Swelling

Swelling is common after a fracture. You can help to reduce the swelling by raising your arm. To do this, rest your hand on multiple pillows – above the level of your heart. Moving your fingers also helps to reduce swelling.

Slings

A sling isn't usually needed for wrist or hand fractures. If you've been given a sling, use it as little as possible. This will stop your shoulder and elbow getting stiff. You need to take the sling off regularly to do your exercises. You should take the sling off when sleeping.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy may be recommended after your fracture has healed and your cast is off.

A physiotherapist can help with exercises and advice to develop your hand, wrist and arm strength so you can return to your normal activities, work or physical activity. You should see an ACC private practice physiotherapist or hand therapist. You may need to make a co-payment for these sessions. You can choose a clinic that suits you best.



Exercises

The following exercises are important. They'll prevent stiffness in your elbow and shoulder and help with swelling. Do them four times a day.



1. Shoulder

- Lift your whole arm above your head.
- Hold your arm up for two seconds then lower it down slowly.
- Repeat this 10 times.



2. Elbow

- Fully bend then straighten out your elbow.
- Repeat this 10 times.



3. Fingers

- Bend your fingers as far as your cast will let you.
- Straighten your fingers completely.
- Spread your fingers as wide as your cast will let you.
- Repeat this 10 times.



4. Thumb

- Rotate your thumb in all directions, as far as your cast will let you.
- Repeat this 10 times.

Written by Orthopaedic and Physiotherapy Services, Christchurch Hospital. Adapted by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed November 2022.