

Serial Casting for stiff joints

This leaflet explains about using serial casting, including the benefits, risks and how it can help recovery of your finger injury or condition. If you have any further questions, please speak to the hand therapist caring for you.

What is serial casting?

Serial casting uses Plaster of Paris (POP) around a joint that has become stiff or tight due to an injury or a long period of immobilisation. The aim is to hold the finger joint in a position to create a gentle stretch, encouraging structures around the joint to lengthen and to improve movement at that joint.

In some cases, serial casting may also be used to protect the finger after an injury to allow the bones and soft tissues to heal before commencing exercises.

What happens during serial casting?

A cast will be placed on your injured/affected finger and a gentle stretch will be applied while the plaster is setting. Your therapist will monitor the fit and feel of the cast in this appointment and will check your circulation after the cast is in place.

The cast takes about fifteen minutes to set and about two hours to fully harden. Please avoid using your hand for any heavy tasks during this time as you may reduce the stretch applied by the POP.

How long will I need to continue with serial casting?

Serial casting may be used for between four and six weeks (and sometimes longer) to help manage a stiff joint or in the presence of

an injury. Your therapist will monitor your progress with regular appointments in hand therapy and your POP will be changed and reapplied at each visit.

What are the risks?

The risks of serial casting include:

- Allergy, e.g. rash or itching
- Circulatory problems, i.e. you may see a colour change at the tip of your finger
- Sensation changes, e.g. throbbing/pins and needles. The POP may be putting pressure on the nerves in the finger and the POP may need to be changed
- Skin breakdown due to excess moisture/cast getting wet
- Pressure sores.

The above risks are extremely rare. At each visit your therapist will monitor the condition of your skin to check for any issues related to the application of the POP and advise you on your progress.

Caring for your POP:

DO:

- Check your circulation within the first 24 hours of the POP being applied to your finger. Your therapist will show you how to do this.
- Let your therapist know as soon as you can if the POP has any sharp edges that cause rubbing or irritation against the skin.

DON'T

- Allow the POP to become wet. Ensure that you use a glove or plastic bag over your hand to keep it dry while showering or bathing.

- Remove your POP if it becomes loose. Contact the hand therapy team as soon as possible if this happens, so that a new POP can be applied.
- Insert anything down the POP to try and scratch or itch your finger as this can cause skin damage and possibly introduce infection.
- Don't allow anything to fall into the cast (e.g. sand) as this can cause skin irritation.

What happens next?

After you have completed a course of serial casting, a splint will be made for you to wear to help maintain any improvements in movement made during this time.

There is a small possibility that you may need serial casting again in the future. This can be discussed with your therapist as needed.

Contact us

If you have any questions regarding the information provided in this leaflet, please feel free to discuss them with your therapist at your next appointment. For more urgent queries the team can be contacted on the **treatment enquiries** phone number listed below.

Your therapist's name is:



Treatment enquiries: 020 8725 1038 (answer phone only)

Appointments: 020 8725 0007

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

