



Upper Limb Orthoses - Care and Advice

Upper Limb Orthoses

Your consultant/doctor or healthcare professional has instructed you to wear an upper limb orthosis following your injury. This leaflet covers the following orthoses:



Collar
and
Cuff



Polysling

Why do I need to wear the orthosis?

You need to wear an orthosis to allow for healing of the bone and/or soft tissues. Your doctor or therapist will decide which orthosis you require.

How long do I need to wear the orthosis?

The length of time that the orthosis is required can vary depending on your injury; your doctor or therapist will provide instructions around this.

How do I manage once I am discharged?

Wearing an orthosis can impact how you manage your daily activities. The information below provides guidance on how to manage this.

Washing and dressing

You will likely need to strip wash in a seated position until the sling and any dressings are removed. Keep the sling on when washing the rest of your body but avoid getting it wet. **If your therapist/nurse has advised it**, you can remove the sling to wash and keep your arm rested in your lap. To clean your underarm, tilt your body forward to let your arm naturally move away from your body. This will create space to allow you to wash this area. To clean the skin underneath the orthosis, remove it and gently use a damp cloth over the skin. Ensure the skin is fully dry before reapplying it.

Clothes that are loose fitting and open at the front are easier to wear (e.g. blouse, shirt or zip-up jumpers). Dress by putting your injured arm in clothes first. Once you have dressed your upper body, place your arm back in the sling. It might be difficult to manage with one hand, and you may require assistance from people around you.

Sleeping and positioning

You must wear your sling overnight to keep the limb supported. You may find it more comfortable to sleep on your back with a pillow supporting your arm.

Posture can make a big difference to your pain after surgery. Try to avoid 'hitching' your shoulder or holding it in an elevated position. Try to avoid slumping or standing/sitting with rounded shoulders, as this puts additional stress on your shoulder.

Skin care

Your skin is prone to pressure damage when wearing a sling. To reduce the risk of developing a pressure sore, you can remove the sling for short periods **(only if advised by your therapist/nurse)** while keeping your arm supported in your lap on a pillow. We strongly advise that you check your skin regularly. Look out for:

- Redness that does not disappear when the orthosis is removed
- Skin breakdown
- Blisters
- New swelling or pain
- Soreness

If you notice any of the above, please inform your GP immediately.

Driving

You will not be able to drive whilst wearing a sling, as you must be able to comfortably control your vehicle and perform emergency manoeuvres. You can discuss this further with your consultant.

DVLA advises that drivers do not need to contact the DVLA if they have had a bone fracture. However, if recovery after a bone fracture is prolonged for more than three months, please seek advice from your orthopaedic consultant on when it is safe to return to driving and whether your insurance company needs to be informed.

Exercises

Please be aware that you may have specific post-injury instructions that include movement restrictions at certain joints.

It is otherwise important to keep your joints as mobile as possible whilst your limb is supported in the sling. You may be able to remove the sling to do your exercises and your physio will advise you on what exercises are suitable and how to carry them out safely.

It is normal to feel some soreness when doing your exercises and for a short period afterwards. However, if the exercises are aggravating the pain or causing other uncomfortable symptoms, and it is not settling with pain relief and rest, please inform a healthcare professional at your next follow-up appointment.

Department address and contact information:

Physiotherapy Department, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston Birmingham, B15 2GW. Telephone: 0121 371 3466

Accessibility

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