Wrist fracture advice after plaster removal

What is a wrist fracture?
A fracture is the medical term for a break in a bone.

What are the causes?
The most common cause of a wrist fracture is a fall onto an outstretched hand, although it can be caused by any sudden force that pushes the hand backwards.

Common symptoms after the plaster is removed
- pain – this may be due to stiffness of the tissues around the area caused by swelling and being in a cast
- swelling – due to the support of the plaster being removed
- shoulder/elbow/wrist stiffness and muscle weakness due to lack of use of the arm
- dry skin/excess hair growth due to being in the cast for a number of weeks
- difficulty with normal daily tasks

What can I do to help?

Pain – painkillers can be helpful; speak to your pharmacist or GP about appropriate medication. Soaking the wrist in warm water before exercise can help reduce pain and stiffness.

Swelling and stiffness – keep your hand above the level of your heart when resting. Move your arm and hand as shown in the exercise section.

Dry skin/excessive hair growth – wash the arm and hand with warm water. Use a basic moisturiser such as aqueous cream for the first few days. Excessive hair growth is normal after coming out of plaster and will resolve in time.

Difficulty with normal daily tasks – your strength and movement will be reduced. It will gradually improve over time but until then be careful when lifting or carrying heavy objects, for example kettles or saucepans.
**Exercise**
It is important to regain the strength and movement in your wrist as soon as possible. These exercises are designed to increase the movement and strength of your wrist and to stop your shoulder and elbow becoming stiff.

**Wrist exercises**

1. With your forearm supported bend and straighten your wrist while keeping your fingers straight throughout. Repeat 3-5 times.

2. Holding your wrist and fingers straight bend your wrist towards your little finger and then towards your thumb. Repeat 3-5 times.

3. Keeping your elbow at your side turn your hand palm up and then palm down. Repeat 3-5 times.

4. With your forearm supported bend your wrist down and gently assist the movement with your other hand. Repeat 3-5 times.

5. Extend your wrist and use your other hand to push it further.
Shoulder and elbow exercises

6. Bend and straighten your elbow. Repeat 3-5 times.

7. Lift your arm up above your head. Repeat 3-5 times.

It is normal to feel some discomfort when moving your wrist initially, but this will reduce with time.

Heat and ice
Ice can be used to help reduce pain. Simply wrap an ice pack or bag of frozen peas in a damp towel and apply for approximately 10 minutes. Heat may help your wrist move more easily. Put your hand in some warm water for a few minutes before doing your exercises.

Healing times and what to expect when the plaster is removed
Most broken wrists will heal within six weeks. It can take many weeks for your wrist to feel normal again but you should find that using the hand becomes easier as time goes on. It is possible that some movements will never be the same as before the injury. If this happens it is unusual for the difference to be so severe that it changes the use of your hand.

If any of the exercises or advice in this leaflet causes your symptoms to worsen please stop the activity and seek advice