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Living with a splint or sling

Following most operations on the upper limb, you will return from the operation theatre wearing a sling or a temporary splint. The type of sling / splint will depend on the treated joint and the nature of the operation you have had.

After most operations the sling / splint is mainly for postoperative comfort and should be discarded as soon as possible. The postoperative splint is usually a temporary plaster slab to support treated joint(s). This plaster slab on the wrist or hand may be converted to a thermoplastic removable splint after a few days.

If an operation has been performed to repair the rotator cuff or stabilize the shoulder joint, then the sling will be attached to a body belt. It will need to be worn at all times in the initial weeks and at night for 6 weeks. The physiotherapist will show you how to wear the sling before you are discharged from the hospital.

It is important that you loosen your splint / sling a few times a day and exercise the other (non-operated) joints. This will prevent stiffness in these joints.

There are certain everyday activities that you will have difficulty with and will need to prepare for:

- If you have been asked to wear the splint / sling all the time you will need assistance to wash the other *unoperated* arm, as you will not be able to do so with the operated arm.
- You will find it easier to dress with front opening clothes, as getting dressed will become tricky. Always dress your *operated* arm first by sliding it into the shirt or top first. You can then use the other arm to bring your shirt / top from behind your back.
- Activities that need pushing up (i.e. getting up from a chair or out of the bath) will become difficult. You will need to use the *unoperated* arm for such activities.
- If you usually hold on to a banister to go up and down stairs, you may find it difficult to do so if the banister is on the operated side. You may need assistance.
- If possible, sleep in a semi-sitting position or lie on your back with a pillow under your operated arm for support. Sleeping will be uncomfortable if you lie on the operated side following surgery and is not recommended.