

Advice on

Ilizarov Frames

Information for patients

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Specialist Support

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format i.e. audiotape, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on Freephone 0800 917 6039

Patient Information

Living with an Ilizarov Frame

This guide has been prepared to assist you throughout your treatment.

There are a variety of reasons why you have been considered for an Ilizarov Frame. It may be following an accident or for a mal-union or non-union of a previous fracture, or to fuse a joint. Following your consultation with an Orthopaedic Consultant, we hope that you have understood some of the reasons for choosing to treat you with an Ilizarov frame. You may now have had some time to think about your decision to proceed with the treatment plan. Please read this information leaflet and discuss any issues it raises with a member of staff. It is important to the whole outcome that you are prepared for the treatment process before surgery as this may ease the passage through what is understandably a lengthy treatment period. There are no set guidelines to how long a frame will be on, as it depends on many different factors, but it will be on for at least four to six months, and could be on for much longer.

The Limb Reconstruction Team

The Orthopaedic Consultant is the Consultant who is in charge of your treatment.

Nurse Specialists have a wide range of experience dealing with patients who have frames.

Physiotherapists are responsible for giving advice on exercise to keep limbs as mobile as possible.

The Occupational Therapist will ensure that your house is safe and may provide a footplate after your operations.

Living with an Ilizarov Frame

Living with an Ilizarov Frame requires some lifestyle changes. It is important to understand these before treatment begins. Many aspects of everyday life may require help. Simple tasks such as washing, dressing, toileting, getting a drink etc may become more difficult especially during the early days when weight-bearing can be an issue.

Clothing can also be a problem as 'normal' trousers do not fit over the frame. Trousers with poppers, shorts, skirts or tracksuit bottoms are the best alternative.

Temperature can cause problems. If it is very hot or cold temperature conducts through the leg. It is not advisable to sunbath with your frame, and to try to avoid going out in very cold weather.

You MAY be able to drive if you have an automatic car and your frame is on your left leg, but PLEASE check with your insurance company.

Pin Site Care

This is something which you can learn to do yourself, but initially may require an appointment either at the hospital or GP's surgery or with the district nurse until you feel confident to carry out the procedure. Full written instructions will be given on how to care for your pinsites. It is important to follow the guidelines to help prevent infection. Infections can be painful, and may require further surgery.

Adjusting the frame

Some frames need to be adjusted. Your Consultant will give full instructions to you. Sometimes it is necessary to have district / practice nurses adjust the frame for you if you are unable to reach the back struts. If you have any problems please contact the Fracture Clinic Nurse Specialist for advice.

Attending Clinic

Initially you will have to attend clinic regularly (held on a Wednesday morning). Attendance is important so that gradual changes can be monitored, especially during the early stages. Failure to attend may lead to serious problems.

Physiotherapy

Attend physiotherapy regularly – this is a vital part of the treatment. Maintaining good joint movement and encouraging walking are vital – inactivity often delays the healing process. Full instructions will be given by your Consultant about your weight bearing status.

Pain

Treatment with an external fixator may be uncomfortable, especially during the early days. During hospital your Consultant will prescribe suitable analgesia (pain relief). As time progresses it will be possible to cut the amount and strength of medication down. Many people find that taking regular paracetamol will help with the pain, especially before any treatment is commenced. Please don't take more than the daily limits, and try to avoid taking anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen as this can delay bone healing. It may be possible to stop taking all analgesia as treatment progresses, but it is more important to be able to live comfortably with the frame than to live in pain.

If there is any different sort of pain during treatment, then it is important to seek medical attention. During the week it is possible to contact Fracture Clinic, but if it is an emergency out of office hours or at the weekend then you must attend the Emergency Department

Care on Leaving Hospital

Once at home, you will come under the care of Fracture Clinic at QA Hospital. The Fracture Clinic is open between 8am and 5pm during the week. You can always phone for advice. The telephone number is 02392 286065, please ask for a nurse who deals with Ilizarov Frames.

Do's

Do keep your limb elevated when not in use.

Do move all joints not affected by the frame.

Do return to Fracture Clinic between 8.30 and 9.00 on weekday mornings, if you have any minor problems or discomfort from the frame.

Do return immediately to either the Fracture Clinic or the Emergency Department if you have any serious problems including

Constant pins and needles

Severe swelling, numbness or inability to move toes

Increased pain

The limb becomes blue and cold (not due to bruising)

Do phone if you have any concerns.

Don'ts

Don't interfere with the nuts and bolts of the frame.

Try not to smoke as this will slow down the bone healing process and is bad for the circulation. If you need help to give up smoking please contact your GP or the NHS Stop Smoking Service on 0800 1690 160

Can I work?

If you have a manual job or cannot work with the frame on please ask the doctor for a sick note in the clinic, or alternatively ask your GP.

Consent – What does this mean?

Before any doctor, nurse or therapist examines or treats you they must have your consent or permission.

Consent ranges from allowing a doctor to take your blood pressure (rolling up your sleeve and presenting your arm is implied consent) to signing a form saying you agree to the treatment that you understand what you are agreeing to. If you do not understand – ask. More detailed information is available on request.

Information about you – The Data Protection Act 1998 (Caldicott Audit)

Confidential records are kept about your health and the care you receive from the NHS. These records are important; helping to make sure you receive the best care from us. The information may also be used to plan NHS services and assist in the teaching and training of health professionals. To make sure that patient confidentiality is maintained a policy has been written informing all staff of their responsibilities.

How to comment on your treatment

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any questions that you have. However, if you have any concerns you can also contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0800 917 6039 or E-mail PALS@porthosp.nhs.uk, who will be happy to talk to you

Further Information: NHS Direct ; Tel 0845 46 47