

What are Simple Fractures?

Simple fractures are the most common and uncomplicated type of fracture and usually occur in the forearms, wrists, hands, lower legs, ankles and feet as a result of lower-velocity accidents like a slip, trip or fall. High impact situations like car accidents or falls from significant height are more likely to cause complex injuries.

Simple Fractures:

- Are non or only very slightly displaced



- Don't extend into the joint space
- Don't have multiple fragments
- Tend to heal well with immobilisation

(Depending on the patient and site and type of fracture, immobilisation could be achieved through a cast, splint, brace or cam boot)

- Are still very painful and swollen!

Just because all of the above may be true, the patient still has a broken bone that will be very uncomfortable until it is adequately stabilised.

How Are Simple Fractures Immobilized?

Depending on the patient and site and type of fracture, immobilisation could be achieved through a cast, splint, brace or cam boot ('moon boot').

Casts for Simple Fractures

Most arm and hand fractures plus some foot and ankle fractures require 4-6 weeks cast immobilisation (the younger you are, the quicker bones heal, so the less time is required in a cast).

Because a fracture is almost always accompanied by moderate to severe swelling for 2-4 days, we initially apply a plaster 'slab' in hospital to one side of the limb and bandage it firmly to keep it in place. This provides sufficient immobilisation while preventing an uncomfortable build-up of pressure that would occur with swelling inside a cast that completely enclosed the limb.



You'll be discharged with a referral to an Ethos Health physiotherapist or other community based service who will remove the slab and apply a proper cast at 3 or 4 days post injury. You have 3 options for casting:

1. Plaster cast: these are cheap (materials ~\$20-\$30) but can be heavy and you cannot get them wet
2. Fibreglass cast with standard liner: these are lighter and stronger than plaster but again, you cannot get them wet. Materials ~\$25-\$35. Plus you can choose colours!
3. Fibreglass cast with waterproof liner: just as strong and light as option 2, but no need to avoid water or bag for bathing / showers as the liner is designed to drain water and dry quickly without skin irritation. You even swim in them (although not at the beach – sand and casts are a bad mix!). The materials used are more expensive (~\$45 for a small child's arm up to ~\$100 for an adult leg), but it only works out at a little over \$1 per day difference to avoid having to wrap your arm or leg in a plastic bag to have a bath or shower which many people find very worthwhile.



Braces for Simple Fractures

Some fractures heal adequately with bracing supplied by an ED or Ethos Health physiotherapy practice. For example, you may be given a cam boot like the picture below:



These boots have an inflatable inner liner to ensure a snug fit and good immobilisation of a simple ankle or foot fracture.

Specialist Referral

There are some simple-looking fractures that can tend to heal poorly, either due to the specific bone involved, the angulation of the fracture line, or a patient's pre-existing medical conditions. The emergency room doctors will recognise these cases and provide a rapid referral to an orthopaedic specialist who will see you with your x-rays within a week of injury while the slab is in place. The specialist will decide with you the best course of action, be that referral for fitting of a cast or brace, or discuss the indications for surgery.