

Elevation after an operation or injury

Information for children and young people

How to properly elevate your sore arm or leg after an injury or operation

Why is this important?

After an injury or operation, it is natural for the sore area to swell up. If the swelling gets too much this can get sore, and pressure can build up under dressings or plaster casts. This may mean you need to come back to hospital or need more treatment.

Good news

There is a very simple trick to prevent this happening so your arm or leg gets better sooner. You can use the power of gravity to help the swelling go away. After lifting (elevating) the sore bit above the level of your heart, gravity does the rest. You will be told how long you need to elevate your arm or leg, but this is often for a few days after your injury or operation.

How to elevate

If you have injured your **arm** (anywhere below the elbow) then elevation can be done in two ways.

1) By using a **sling** or '**collar and cuff**' and avoid your arm hanging down by your side. We will fit your sling for you and show you how to use it.

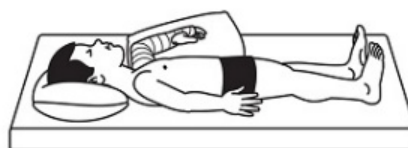


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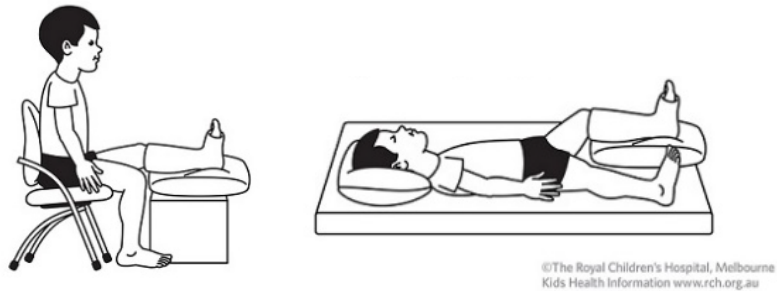
2) If you are sitting or lying down, use pillows or cushions to **prop up your arm**. The hand should be higher than the elbow, and the arm higher than the level of your heart. Your heart is at the level of your nipples on your chest.



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If you have injured your **leg** (anywhere below the thigh) then elevation can be done in two ways too:

- 1) If you have been given a **wheelchair** then make sure you put your sore leg up on the leg extension. We will show you how to do this.
- 2) When you are sitting on a normal chair or lying down, **prop the leg up**. The foot should be higher than the knee, and the knee should be higher than the hip. Make sure the weight of your leg is not resting on your heel though as this can cause skin problems. Place the pillows under the knee and calf rather than under the ankle and foot.



What else can I do to get rid of swelling?

The answer is movement. As much as your pain, dressings, splint, or plaster cast will allow, get your body moving. Even wiggling your fingers and toes gets the muscles moving and the muscles act as pumps to squeeze the swelling away.

What should I do if I'm worried?

Ask us for help. We are here to provide more information and advice.

If you have increasing pain, swelling, or your fingers or toes look white or blue, feel funny or don't work properly, please get in contact.

Paediatric Emergency Department --0131 312 0017 / 0018

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