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## What is a cast?

A cast is a stiff, solid dressing that supports a body part while a bone is healing after injury or surgery. It is either made of fiberglass or plaster.

## How do I care for my child's cast?

After the cast is put on, let it dry completely. **DO NOT** cover it.

- If your child has a fiberglass cast, it most often takes 5 to 10 minutes to dry.
- If your child has a plaster cast, it most often takes 20 to 30 minutes to dry.

Keep the extremity (arm or leg) with the cast raised above the level of the heart to help prevent swelling.

- Change its position about every 2 hours while your child is awake.
- Use pillows to prop the cast off hard surfaces. This helps avoid dents.
- If your child has a sling, remove it when elevating the cast and when your child is sleeping.

Check the skin around and under the edges of the cast each day. The skin should not be dry, red or irritated. To help prevent skin problems:

- Keep rough edges of the cast covered with moleskin.
- Do not force moleskin under the cast.
- Do not trim the cast.

Do not allow any moisture on the cast.

- Only give your child sponge baths.
  - First place a towel or washcloth around the top part of the cast.
  - Cover the entire cast with 2 plastic bags or use “Glad Wrap Press and Seal” for smaller casts.
  - Use a damp – not wet – cloth and mild soap to clean the skin. Dry it with a towel.
  - Please note these methods do not protect a cast at the pool or beach or if the cast goes under water.
- Do not use lotions, oils or powder around the edges or under the cast.

Call the doctor to schedule a cast change right away if the cast:

- Is saturated (soaked).
- Gets wet more than 1 time.
- Gets dirty.

## What about itching?

- **DO NOT** let your child put anything inside the cast. This could hurt the skin and cause infection.
- Gently pat the cast above the area that itches.
- Keep your child as cool as possible.
- Use a hair dryer to blow cool air under the cast.
- If the itching is very bad, ask your child's doctor about medicine for itching.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Cast Care, continued

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## How do I check feeling and blood flow?

Make sure the cast is not too tight and that blood can flow well around the cast. **Every 8 hours, or more often if needed, be sure to check:**

- Movement – have your child move or wiggle their fingers or toes.
- Feeling (sensation) – touch the area above and below the cast to make sure it feels normal to your child.
- Blood flow (circulation) – press briefly on your child’s middle fingernail or large toenail. When it turns white, let go. The pink color should return within 3 seconds.
- Temperature – check to make sure their hand or foot is warm. If cold, cover it with a blanket and check again in 20 minutes. Check feeling and blood flow if it is still cold.
- Swelling – look for swelling above and below the cast. A little swelling is normal, but a lot of swelling is not. Compare the arm or leg with the cast to the other one. If there is swelling, raise it above the level of the heart for 1 hour.

## How can my child be comfortable with a cast?

- Have your child rest the first few days. Do not let them do anything too tiring or active, such as running, jumping or climbing.
- If the arm or leg swells after activity, raise it above the level of the heart.

### Arm casts

- If your child is using a sling to support their arm, raise the wrist higher than the elbow when your child walks or sits.
- Use a sling only as advised by the doctor.

### Leg casts

- Keep pressure off the heels when your child is lying down to help prevent sores on the heels.
- When your child is lying on their side, put a thin pillow between their legs.

## What should I know about cast safety?

- Avoid knocking the cast against things. Check often for cracks, dents, tightness or looseness. Call the doctor if you notice any of these.
- Poor cast care can cause serious problems. If a broken or damaged cast is not fixed, the bone might not heal right. If the cast breaks, keep the area as still as possible and call your child’s doctor.
- If the doctor allows your child to walk on the cast, clear the path of toys, small floor rugs, pets and other things your child might trip over.
- Do not let your child walk on wet, slippery or waxed floors.
- If allowed to walk, your child may wear a flat, non-skid, supportive cast shoe.
- Cover the cast with a towel during meals to keep food from spilling inside.

## How is the cast taken off?

Scan the QR code to learn what to expect.



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# Cast Care, continued

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## What happens after the cast is off?

- The arm or leg may look and feel a little different, but it will soon begin to feel like it did before.
- The skin will look dry, pale and scaly. To soften and remove the dead skin, soak the arm or leg in warm water, dry the skin well, and use lotion. Never scrub to remove the scales.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor right away if your child has any of these problems.

Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decreased or loss of movement in the fingers or toes</li></ul>
Feeling (sensation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Numbness or tingling</li><li>• Pain that is different than before</li><li>• Pain that does not get better with medicine</li></ul>
Blood flow (circulation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pink color that does not return to nails in 3 seconds after briefly pressing down and letting go</li><li>• Change in skin color below the cast</li></ul>
Temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hand or foot that is still cold after covering it</li><li>• Fever (temperature of 100.4 F or higher) for longer than 24 hours with no other symptoms</li></ul>
Swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New swelling that does not go down after raising the arm or leg above the level of the heart for 1 hour</li></ul>
Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Red or irritated skin</li><li>• Sores</li></ul>
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bad smell coming from inside the cast</li><li>• Bright red drainage on the cast</li><li>• Drainage around the cast</li></ul>
Cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A crack in the cast</li><li>• A wet cast that does not dry all the way</li><li>• Something stuck in the cast</li></ul>

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# Cast Care, continued

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## Your checklist

Use this list to keep track of what you need to know before going home. Talk with your child’s nurse, physical therapist (PT) or doctor if you have questions.

- How to cover the cast before a sponge bath
- How to check the skin and help with itching
- How to check feeling and blood flow
- How to use a car seat or seat belt
- How to walk or move your child
- How to get supplies
- When to call the doctor
- When to schedule a follow-up visit
- If needed – how to:
  - Use crutches
  - Use a wheelchair

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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