

# C-collar (Cervical collar)

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## Remember:

- A C-collar is a hard collar worn on the neck. Your child may need to wear one while an injury or stable neck fracture heals.
- Your child's doctor will tell you whether your child needs to wear the C-collar at all times or if he can remove it.
- Your child should sleep on his back with no pillows.
- Take care to prevent slips and falls while bathing. Do not get the collar wet.
- If you are allowed to remove the collar to wash your child's neck, make sure your child's head and neck do not move.



## What is a C-collar?

A C-collar (or Aspen collar) is a hard neck collar worn for a neck injury or ongoing neck pain (even if X-rays are normal). Your child may need to wear a C-collar while he heals.

A neck injury may include:

- A soft tissue injury (muscles, ligaments or tendons)
- A stable fracture of the cervical spine (neck)

## What happens after my child starts wearing a C-collar?

Your child may need to follow-up with his pediatrician or a neurosurgeon. Until the follow-up visit, your child should wear the C-collar as directed by the treating doctor (such as an emergency department doctor).

## How long does my child need to wear a C-collar?

Talk with your child's doctor about how many weeks your child needs to wear the C-collar. This will depend on how fast your child heals.

- Most often, your child will have an X-ray or exam after the initial injury.
- Some children need to wear the C-collar all the time for 6 to 12 weeks.

## How should I care for my child?

### Wearing the C-collar

Talk with your child's doctor about when your child needs to wear the C-collar. Ask if your child needs to wear the C-collar at all times or if he can remove it for a short time.

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

# C-collar, continued

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- Your child may need to wear the C-collar 24 hours a day. This means he may not remove it at all.
- Your child's doctor may let you remove the C-collar to wash your child's neck. If this is OK, keep your child's neck straight.
- If your child has a less severe injury, he may only need to wear the C-collar for comfort. Often, the C-collar can help decrease pain after a soft tissue injury.

## Sleeping

Your child will need to sleep in the C-collar (unless his doctor tells you otherwise). It is important for your child to keep his neck in the right place while his injury heals. This includes during sleep.

Encourage your child to sleep on his back. Do not use pillows. This is to help keep his neck as straight as possible.

## Bathing

Your child will not be able to move his neck from side to side while he wears the C-collar. This can increase the risk of slips and falls while bathing. To help prevent falls:

- Use a non-slip shower mat. Place the mat on the bathtub floor away from the drain.
- Help your child get into the empty bath and sit down.
- Help your child get out of bath. Make sure he is stable and does not slip or fall.

When bathing your child:

- **Keep the C-collar dry.**
- Use a flexible shower hose to wash and rinse your child's body. You can buy a shower hose that fits over your existing faucet at many stores.
- Do not wash your child's hair. Use dry shampoo instead. You can buy dry shampoo in stores or online. Follow the directions that come with the dry shampoo to know how to use it.
- Help dry and dress your child if needed.

## Washing your child's neck

To wash your child's neck, it is best to have 2 adults (especially for younger or less cooperative children). Lay your child on a towel on a firm surface. Do not use any pillows.

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## C-collar, continued

### To wash the front of your child's neck:

- One adult should keep your child's head still. To do this, hold your child's head on either side above his ears. The second adult may remove the front chin piece. Undo both of the Velcro tabs.
- Wash around the front of your child's neck and under his chin with a soft, damp washcloth. Use a mild soap or body wash to clean his neck. Then, wipe again with plain water to make sure all soap is removed.
- Dry your child's skin gently with a soft towel. Do not put on any powder or lotion.
- Replace the front section of the C-collar. To do this, scoop the collar along your child's breastbone to make sure the chin piece sits firmly under his chin for support. Leave the Velcro tabs undone.

### To wash the back of your child's neck:

- One adult should keep holding your child's head still. The second adult may remove the back part of the C-collar. To do this, slide it out sideways between your child's neck and towel. **Do not lift your child's head or bend his neck.**
- Wash and dry the back of your child's neck as best as you can without moving your child's head.
- Dry your child's skin gently with a soft towel. Do not put on any powder or lotion.
- Replace the back part of the C-collar. To do this, slide it under your child's neck until you can see the same amount of collar on both sides. Continue to keep your child's head and neck still.



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## C-collar, continued

- Close the Velcro tabs. Make sure that both sides are the same. The C-collar should fit firmly around your child's neck. The plastic chin piece should not come forward of your child's chin.
- Make sure that there are no plastic or Velcro pieces touching your child's skin. This could cause redness or rash.
- Help your child to get up and get dressed if needed.



### When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child has:

- Increased pain from initial injury
- Weakness or numbness (such as "pins and needles") in his arms or legs
- Broken skin under the C-collar. (Only check for this if your child's doctor lets you remove the C-Collar for washing.)
- Redness or rash near the C-collar

Also call your child's doctor if you have concerns that the C-collar does not fit well.

### When should I call 911?

Call 911 **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Trouble swallowing
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Cannot move his arms or legs all of a sudden

**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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