

What is a splint?

A splint is a hard device that holds an injured body part in place while it heals. Splints can be made from plaster or fiberglass, or they can be a “ready-made.” They come in many sizes. Some splints are called air casts.

A fiberglass splint is cut to the correct size and shape of your child’s injured body part. The splint hardens and keeps its shape. An elastic bandage secures it and allows room for swelling.

Why does my child need a splint instead of a cast?

A splint may be used instead of a cast because:

- Broken bones cause swelling that can lead to a poor fitting cast.
- A splint can help to keep the bone stable until swelling improves. Then a cast can be placed.

Are splints only used for broken bones?

- Splints can also be used to treat sprains and strains.
- Fiberglass splints provide strong support while the injury heals. It can be left in place safely for 1 to 2 weeks.

How can I help decrease swelling?

- Raise the splinted arm or leg above the level of the heart as much as possible.
- Put ice on the injured body part for the first 24 to 48 hours to help decrease swelling and pain.
 - Ice can be used for 20 minutes every 2 hours while your child is awake.
 - Wrap the ice pack with a towel or plastic bag to help protect your child’s skin and keep the splint dry.
 - Do not put ice directly on the skin.

Arm splints

- When using a sling to support their arm, raise the wrist higher than the elbow while they are awake.
- Use a sling only as advised by the doctor.

Foot or leg splints

- Raise the leg as often as possible to help decrease swelling.
- Limit activities as advised by the doctor.
- Your child may need to use crutches.

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

Splint care, continued

Can my child take a bath or shower?

- Your child can take a bath or shower, but they must keep the splint dry unless it is waterproof.
 - Cover the splint with plastic bags or use “Glad Wrap Press and Seal.”
 - Have them hold the body part with the splint outside the tub or shower.
- If the splint gets splashed, dry it with a hair dryer on the cool setting. Do not use the warm or hot setting.
- If the splint goes under water, gets soaked or does not dry well, call your child’s doctor.
- Do not remove the splint for bathing if your child has a broken bone.
- If the splint is being used for a sprain or strain (not a broken bone), the doctor may allow you to remove the splint while your child bathes and then put it back on afterwards.

How do I care for my child with a splint?

Make sure the splint is not too tight and that blood can flow well around the splint. **Check for these things:**

Numbness or tingling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your child should not have numbness or tingling.• Have them wiggle their toes or fingers to increase blood flow.
Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your child’s toes and fingers should be pink and warm.• Your child’s foot or hand may have a slightly blue color if it has been below the level of the heart for awhile. If this happens:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Raise the leg or arm.– Recheck it in 20 minutes.
Temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your child’s toes or fingers may feel cool after the splint is first put on.• After this, they should be the same temperature as the rest of your child’s body.
Swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your child’s foot or hand may look swollen if it has been below the level of the heart for awhile. If this happens:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Raise the leg or arm.– Recheck it in 20 minutes.
Skin irritation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check the skin around the edges of the splint for redness or irritation. If the skin is red or irritated, call your child’s doctor.• If the skin below the elastic bandage stays too pale or feels cold to touch, the bandage may be too tight.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Remove the bandage, and rewrap it.– Check to see if the skin color and temperature returns to normal in 20 minutes. If not, remove the elastic bandage. Then call your child’s doctor.

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Splint care, continued

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if your child has any of these:

- Increased pain that does not get better after taking acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin or less costly store brand)
- The splinted hand, arm, foot, leg or finger stays numb, swollen, painful, slightly blue in color, or cold to touch 20 minutes after being raised or elastic bandage loosened
- Fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher)
- Red or irritated skin around the edges of the splint
- The splint gets wet and does not dry well with a blow dryer set on the coolest setting

What else do I need to know?

Your child's doctor may have you schedule a follow-up visit with an orthopedist (bone doctor).

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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