
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. Not all casts are water-resistant.

How do I care for my child with a cast?

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.
- 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.

Can my child's cast get wet?

Your child has a water-resistant cast, NOT a waterproof cast.

- This means the cast can get wet, but water will still get inside.
- The water-resistant material does not absorb moisture. This helps decrease the risk of skin and cast problems.

Your child may take a bath or shower with their cast. The cast may take 1 to 3 hours to dry. Let the cast dry all the way before getting it wet again.

If your child's arm cast goes past the elbow or leg cast goes past the knee:

- Wrap plastic wrap or a plastic bag around the ends of the cast before bathing. This helps keep most of the water out of the cast.
- They can sometimes trap moisture. This may cause mild skin irritation or rashes. This most often heals quickly and does not cause long-term issues.

Can my child swim with their cast?

It is OK to swim in most swimming pools with a cast. Talk with the doctor before letting your child swim in lakes, rivers or oceans.

After your child swims:

- Rinse the cast with clear water.
- Let the cast drain. Hang your child's arm downward and let the water flow out of the cast.
- Use a towel on the outside of the cast to help it dry faster.

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

Water-Resistant Cast Care, continued

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.

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.
- Run water down the cast.
- Keep your child as cool as possible.
- If the itching is very bad, ask your child’s doctor about medicine for itching.

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. Make sure they wear a flat, non-skid, supportive cast shoe.
- Cover the cast with a towel during meals to keep food from spilling inside.
- Do not pull out the lining of the cast.
- Do not try to remove the cast at home. Serious injury can happen.

How is the cast taken off?

Scan the QR code to learn what to expect.



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Water-Resistant Cast Care, continued

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">• Decreased or loss of movement in the fingers or toes
Feeling (sensation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Numbness or tingling• Pain that is different than before• Pain that does not get better with medicine
Blood flow (circulation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pink color that does not return to nails in 3 seconds after briefly pressing down and letting go• Change in skin color below the cast
Temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hand or foot that is still cold after covering it or raising it above the level of the heart for 20 minutes• Fever (temperature of 100.4 F or higher) for longer than 24 hours with no other symptoms
Swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New swelling that does not go down after raising the arm or leg above the level of the heart for 1 hour
Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red or irritated skin• Sores
Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bad smell coming from inside the cast• Bright red drainage on the cast• Drainage around the cast
Cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A crack in the cast• A wet cast that does not dry all the way• Something stuck in the cast

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Water-Resistant Cast Care, continued

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 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: _____

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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