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## Cast Care

A cast can help support and protect an injury as it heals. It is important to keep up with the proper care of the cast and be aware of potential complications.

Casts are custom-made to fit and support injured limbs. Most casts are Fiberglass casts. Fiberglass is a type of plastic that can be shaped. Fiberglass casts are typically lighter and more durable than traditional plaster casts. Air circulates more freely inside a fiberglass cast. Also, X-rays penetrate fiberglass casts better than plaster casts. This is helpful if your doctor wants to use an X-ray to examine your bones while he or she is still wearing the cast. Fiberglass casts are available in different colors. Plaster casts are still used in specific conditions where there is a significant amount of swelling or if it is applied during surgery.

### **What can be done to reduce swelling?**

Swelling can cause your cast to feel tight and uncomfortable. To reduce swelling:

- Elevate the affected area. For the first 24 to 72 hours after your cast is applied, use pillows to raise the cast above the level of your heart. Try to keep the cast raised even while you sleep.
- Frequently move the fingers of his or her injured limb, making a full tight fist a few times a day.
- Apply ice. For the first 48 to 72 hours after your cast is applied, loosely wrap an ice pack covered in a thin towel around your cast. Apply ice to the cast -not the skin - for 20 minutes every two hours.

### **What can I do if I want to scratch under the cast?**

A cast can cause your underlying skin to feel itchy. To relieve itchy skin:

- Set a hair dryer on a cool setting and aim it under the cast
- Apply an ice pack covered in a thin towel to the area
- Do NOT stick objects, such as a coat hanger inside the cast to scratch his or her skin. This could injure your skin and cause an infection.

## Is it OK to get a cast wet?

It depends on the type of cast. For example:

- Fiberglass and Plaster casts with standard padding **CAN NOT GET WET**
- Fiberglass cast with special water proof padding (this is an additional cost and is not covered by your insurance) – it is OK to get the waterproof cast wet as long as you have the doctor's OK. If you swim with the waterproof cast, thoroughly rinse the inside of the cast with clean water afterward. Generally, you can allow the cast to air-dry. Keep in mind that even a fiberglass cast can become uncomfortable and irritate your skin when wet.
- Bathing: All casts should be covered in plastic or a waterproof shield during daily bathing.

To dry any type of cast, use a hair dryer on cool setting. Do NOT use a warm or hot setting, which could burn your skin. You can also use a vacuum cleaner hose to pull air through the cast to speed up the drying process.

## How can I keep my cast in good shape?

- Keep it clean. Keep dirt and sand away from the inside of your cast.
- Cover your cast while he or she is eating.
- Skip lotions. Avoid placing powder, lotion or deodorant on or near the cast.
- Leave adjustments to your doctor. Don't pull the padding out of your cast. Don't trim the cast or breakoff rough edges without first asking your doctor.

## What else do I need to know about my cast?

Contact your child's doctor immediately if:

- Your skin becomes red or raw around the cast
- You feel increasing pain and tightness in the injured limb
- You feel numbness or tingling in the injured hand or foot that is more than momentary.
- You feel burning or stinging under the cast
- You develop excessive swelling below the cast
- You can't move the toes or fingers of his or her injured limb or they become blue or cold
- The cast develops a crack, soft spots, a foul odor or becomes soaking wet and doesn't dry after use of a hair dryer or vacuum cleaner hose
- The cast feels too tight or too loose

Caring for a cast isn't always easy. Remember that taking care of your cast will help minimize discomfort during the healing process