

CAST CARE

GENERAL INFORMATION

Casts are used to help immobilize an injured part of the body after fractures, surgery or other injuries.

Splints are “half-casts” that immobilize the fracture, though not as rigidly as a full cast. Splints allow for swelling while immobilizing a fracture. It is usually used in the immediate post-injury or post-operative period before changing to a cast.

Casts are usually applied by placing padding over the injured extremity then wrapping it with gauze saturated with Plaster of Paris or the cast may be made of fiberglass. Before the injury heals, it may be necessary to change the cast one or more times. The time that the cast remains in place depends on how much time is needed for healing. Some casts are needed for only two weeks while others are needed for several months.

Radiographs through the cast will determine that there is satisfactory alignment of the bones involved, and later check for signs of bone healing.

CARE OF THE CAST

- Do not allow pressure on any part of the cast until it is completely dry. Pressure on a cast that is not completely dry may result in a depression in the cast that may create pressure on the skin underneath, making ulcer formation likely. The time required for drying varies, depending on the thickness of the cast, temperature, and humidity. Drying of Plaster of Paris casts can require 24 hours of longer.
- If the cast accidentally gets wet and a soft area appears, return to the doctor’s office, emergency room or outpatient surgical facility for repairs or changing the cast. This should be done as soon as reasonable after the cast gets wet (within 24 hours).
- Do not get sand in the cast.
- Do not put anything inside the cast, including in attempt to scratch an itchy area (see below)

ITCHING INSIDE A CAST

- Itching is a common, yet frustrating problem for a person with a cast, especially during hot weather.
- Even if you can reach the itchy area, do not scratch the skin inside the cast. Because the skin is in a hot, moist environment, it is susceptible to damage. Scratching is more likely to injure the skin under normal circumstances.
- Do not put anything in the cast, especially to itch.
- If no incision (surgery) was made, you may sprinkle cornstarch into the cast to relieve itching.
- If surgery was performed and there is an incision, consult your doctor for pain medication or medication to reduce itching.
- Using a hairdryer (with the temperature setting on cold) over the area may also reduce the itchiness, whether or not an incision is there.

CARE OF THE PATIENT IN A CAST

- Whenever possible, raise the body part enclosed in the cast. If it can be raised above the heart, this is optimal. This decreases the likelihood of excessive swelling of the tissues underneath the cast. Elevate and rest a leg cast on a pillow when in bed, and on a footstool or chair when sitting. Rest an arm cast on a pillow placed on the chest.
- No matter how carefully the injured tissues are handled and no matter how expertly the cast is applied, it is still possible for excessive swelling to occur under the cast. If this happens, one or more of the following symptoms will probably become noticeable:
 1. Severe and persistent pain
 2. Change in color of the tissues beyond the end of the cast, such as a change to blue or gray under the nails of the fingers or toes.
 3. Coldness of the tissues beyond the cast when the remaining part of the body is warm.
 4. Numbness or complete loss of feeling in the skin beyond the cast.
 5. Feeling of tightness under the cast after it dries
 6. Swelling of the tissue to a greater extent than was present before the cast was applied
 7. For a leg cast, inability to raise the big toe

If any of the above signs or symptoms occur, contact our office or an emergency room as soon as possible for treatment.

INFECTION INSIDE A CAST

Sometimes the injured area becomes infected during healing. Detecting the infection in the early stages may be difficult if the infected area is covered by a cast. Infection should be reported immediately to your doctor. The following are common signs and symptoms of infection:

- Foul smell
- Fever greater than 101⁰F (may be accompanied by a general ill feeling)
- Leakage of fluid through the cast
- Increasing pain or soreness of the skin under the cast

BATHING WITH A CAST

You may find bathing difficult when wearing a cast. The cast must be kept dry at all times, so do not take showers. If the cast is on a limb, such as your arm or leg, you may take tub baths with the casted extremity propped up by the tub or a chair, out of the water. If the cast is on the trunk of the body, you should take sponge baths until the cast is removed.