

## Cast and Splint Care

Your child needs a cast or splint. The cast or splint is needed to keep a broken bone from moving while it heals. A splint is also sometimes used to support or keep an area from moving when there is an injury but the bone is not broken.

### Care of the Cast or Splint

- It is normal for your child to have some pain and discomfort while in the cast or splint. The doctor may give you a prescription for pain medicine or the doctor may have you give your child acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin® or Advil®).
- The cast or splint will feel warm to your child right after it is put on. It will cool as it hardens and will not harm him or her.
- The cast or splint will be damp when it is new. Be careful not to dent or crack it. **Do not put anything over the cast or splint until it is completely dry.**
- Do not let anyone sign the cast until it has been on for 24 hours. The cast may be signed with a marker. Paint, oil-based materials and stickers should **not** be used on the cast. These things will clog the pores of the cast and keep air from getting to the skin.
- If your child's cast is **NOT** waterproof, keep the cast or splint clean and dry. If the cast gets dirty, use a damp cloth and a small amount of soap on small areas to get it clean. If the cast gets wet, do not cover it. Expose the cast or splint to sunlight or use a hairdryer on the cool setting to blow air down into the cast. If the cast does not dry completely, call your doctor.
- If your child's cast **IS** waterproof, he or she may shower or bathe with the cast uncovered.
- Cold packs may be used for 20 minutes at a time for the first 48 to 72 hours after the injury to decrease swelling. First place a cloth on the cast or splint over the injured area. Place the cold pack onto the cloth. Commonly used cold packs include: single use and reusable ice packs, ice placed in a sealed plastic bag and frozen vegetables in a bag. (Be sure to label any bag that is not reusable and throw it out after you are no longer using it for an ice pack.)

### Skin Care

- For the first few days after the cast or splint has been put on, your child's fingers or toes may be swollen. Keep the hurt arm or leg raised above the level of the heart as much as possible. This helps to keep the swelling down, and will make him more comfortable.
- Have your child change positions often when lying down or resting. This will keep pressure off any one area. Long time pressure in the same place can cause skin sores.

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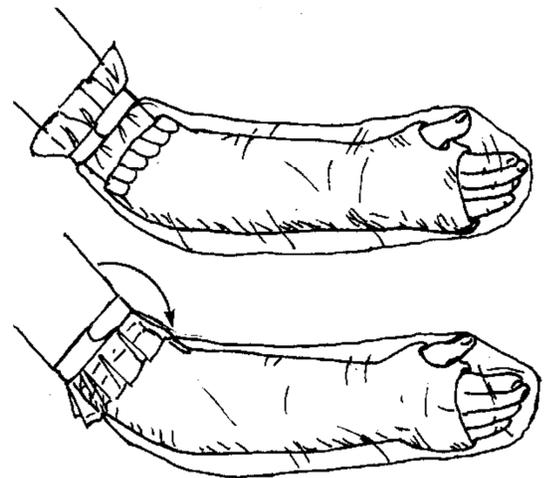
## Skin Care, continued

- Check the skin around the openings of the cast every day. Look for any red, dry, swollen, cracked or bleeding areas. Contact your doctor if you see any of these. For casts on the arms, be sure to closely check the area between the thumb and fingers. You can use an emery board to smooth rough spots on the cast between the thumb and index finger.
- Do not use powders or lotions around the openings of the cast. Lotion can make the skin too soft. Powder can collect under the cast. These can cause pressure sores and other skin problems.
- Do not stick anything inside the cast or splint. This may injure the skin and lead to infection. It could also disturb the lining of the cast and make it uncomfortable.
- Do not pull out the padding of the cast. The padding protects the skin from injury.
- **Do not remove the cast yourself.**
- Your doctor will tell you if your child's splint may be removed for certain activities and then put back on. **Do not remove the splint unless your doctor has told you it is okay and you have been shown how to put it back on.**
- If your child's cast is not waterproof, you may clean your child's fingers or toes of the injured arm or leg with waterless soaps and sanitizers. These products should be used after using the bathroom and before eating. Many different products are sold at grocery stores and drug stores. If it IS waterproof, you may allow your child to let soapy water run down the area of the cast but be sure to rinse the soapy water out completely.
- Check for infection. If you see the fingers or toes turning purple, or your child is in a lot of pain, call his doctor's office.

## Itching

If your child complains of itching, you may try:

- Thump or knock gently on the cast
- Use a hair dryer on a cool setting. Blow air into the opening of the cast.
- Call your child's doctor and ask about giving your child Benadryl<sup>®</sup> to decrease itching.



**Picture 1** Use a plastic bag and tape to protect the cast or splint when bathing.

## Bathing With a Cast or Splint

Follow the instructions checked below:

- Your child may take a bath.
- Your child may take a shower.
- Your child should **not** take a shower.
- Your child should be sponge bathed only.

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Before your child bathes, cover the cast or splint with a plastic bag and seal it. To do this:

1. Put on a plastic bag or trash bag with no holes. Gather it above the cast or splint. Tape it snugly all the way around the arm or leg (Picture 1). **Do not use rubber bands.**
  2. Fold the plastic bag back over the tape.
  3. Tape the folded edges of the bag all the way around your child's arm or leg. (Try to tape in a different place each time to prevent skin irritation.)
- **Do not let your child put the cast or splint into the water or a stream of water.**
  - Remove the bag as soon as the bath or shower is over. Check to be sure the cast or splint is not wet.
  - Replace the splint after showering/bathing.

### Activity

- No rough play is allowed while the cast or splint is on.
- Your child should not take part in sports, swimming or other water play. This is for his safety and the safety of others.
- Children with casts may go to school. Sometimes they need help to carry bags and get around crowded hallways and stairs.
- Do not let your child walk on the cast or splint. This could damage it and may cause hip and back problems.
- Your child should follow the instructions that were given for using crutches or a walker. (Refer to the Helping Hand, *Crutch Walking*, HH-II-6, or *Walkers (Orthopedic)*, HH-II-140.)
- If your doctor wants your child to wear a sling, it should be worn when he is up walking. **Your child should not wear the sling when lying down or going to bed unless his doctor tells you it is okay.**
- When undressing, remove the clothing from the healthy arm or leg first. Then remove it from the casted or splinted arm or leg. When dressing, first put the injured arm or leg into the clothing, then the healthy arm or leg.

### When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor if:

- Drainage or a foul odor comes from the cast or splint.
- There are any changes in circulation checks. Refer to Helping Hand *Circulation Checks*, HH-II-60.
- There are any cracks in the cast.

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## When to Call the Doctor, continued

- The wrap on the splint unravels or comes loose and cannot be replaced without moving the splint.
- Your child's temperature is higher than 101° (by mouth or rectum) **or** 100° axillary (under the arm).
- Your child's pain does not get better or worsens with the body part elevated, with ice application, or with pain medicine.
- The swelling of the fingers or toes does not start to go down.
- Anything falls into the cast and gets stuck.
- If the cast gets wet and you cannot get it completely dry.

## Other Tips and Advice

### Removing the Cast or Splint

- **Do not try to remove the cast or splint yourself.**
- During your follow-up appointment, the doctor will decide when the cast or splint will be taken off. Before it can be taken off, new bone must form where the break had been. Many things affect how fast new bone will grow. These include: age, overall health, nutrition and amount of rest. When enough new bone has formed, the cast or splint will be removed at the Orthopedic Clinic, Plastic Surgery Clinic or the doctor's office.
- A cast removing device will be used to take the cast off (Picture 2). This device vibrates back and forth very quickly and makes a loud noise. While the cast is being cut off, the vibration usually produces heat. This will not hurt your child unless the padding has been pulled out.



**Picture 2** A special cast removing device may be used to take the cast off.

### After the Cast is Removed

When the cast is removed, your child's skin will look yellow and flaky. This is normal. This is because the cast keeps the dead skin cells from falling off. It is also normal for hair on the casted arm or leg to be long and darker when the cast is removed. This will go away in a few weeks.

- Do not scrub the skin. The skin is very sensitive and tender because it has been covered for so long.
- Soak the arm or leg in warm water. Pat the skin dry gently and apply lotion. The skin will go back to normal.
- Your child's muscles may be stiff and sore at first. The doctor or therapist may suggest special exercises to improve strength and movement.

**If you have any questions, please call:**

Your child's  
doctor\_\_\_\_\_

The orthopedic  
doctor\_\_\_\_\_

The plastic  
surgeon\_\_\_\_\_

Nationwide Children's Hospital Orthopedic Center at 614-722-5175.

Nationwide Children's Hospital Plastic Surgery Center at 614-722-6299.

**Your follow up appointment is:**

On\_\_\_\_\_

With\_\_\_\_\_

At\_\_\_\_\_

Please call if you have any questions\_\_\_\_\_