

Cast Care

General Information

You have a cast because you have a fractured bone. The cast keeps the bone from moving so your body can heal. The broken bone will hurt and you will have some swelling around the area.

Cast Care

Your cast is made either of plaster or fiberglass. A plaster cast takes about 24 to 48 hours to dry while a fiberglass cast takes about one hour to dry.

Do not rest your cast on a hard surface with an edge until it is totally dry. Otherwise, you could dent your cast. That could cause a pressure sore on your skin. Leave your cast uncovered and stay still until it is dry.

You will need to keep your cast clean and dry. If your cast becomes soiled, you can clean it with a lightly damp cloth and mild soap. Do not paint the cast; this will close the cast's pores. If you find a rough edge on your cast, you can lightly file it with a nail file or emery board.

Once a cast is wet it can soften and crumble or crack. Use plastic to protect your cast while you bathe. Double garbage bags work well for this.

Skin Care

It is important to take care of your skin under the cast. Clean the area every day. Use a slightly damp cloth and reach as far as you can without getting the cast wet. Do the same between your fingers or toes. Check the cast for rough edges and watch for skin irritations.

Do not use anything to scratch under the cast. This may break the skin and cause an infection. To relieve itching under the cast, you may aim a hairdryer (on the "cool" setting) at the cast openings. If itching continues, call your doctor.

General Precautions

- Follow your health care provider's instructions about physical activity.
- Move your fingers or toes a lot to reduce swelling and prevent joint stiffness. Your toes or fingers should move easily.
- If your health care provider fits you with a walking shoe, wear it all the time except when you sleep or shower.
- Keep from bumping or knocking the cast against any hard surface.
- To keep swelling down, keep the arm or leg with the cast raised comfortably on pillows while you rest. Do not do too much physically. Your body needs time to heal.
- Do not stuff cotton, toilet tissue or anything under the margins of the cast. These items may fall into the cast and cause serious medical problems.
- Do not trim or cut down the length of the cast yourself.

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When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have any problems with your cast and if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- pain that does not get better with medicine
- a cast that feels too snug or tight
- painful rubbing or pressure under your cast
- coldness or a bluish color of the limb that has the cast
- pain, numbness or tingling in the casted fingers or toes
- inability to move your fingers or toes
- a foul odor from the cast or limb
- new bleeding through the cast.

If you have an infant or young child with a cast, call your doctor if your soothing cannot stop your child's crying.

Getting Rid of the Cast

When the fracture heals, the cast will be taken off with a special saw that cuts the cast, but not the skin. This is fast and painless.