

# How to Care for a Cast, Splint or Both

## General Information

You have been asked to wear a cast or splint because you have injured your arm or leg. The cast or splint gives support to the bone and soft tissue and prevents the bone from moving so your body can heal. The extra support the cast or splint provides will reduce pain, swelling and muscle spasms.

## Cast Care

Your cast is made of plaster or fiberglass. When a cast is applied, you will notice that the cast feels warm against your skin. This is normal and will last 15 to 20 minutes.

A plaster cast takes about 24 to 48 hours to dry while a fiberglass cast takes about one hour to dry. The following tips will help you to care for your cast.

- Do not rest your cast on a hard surface with an edge until it is totally dry. Otherwise, you could dent your cast which may cause a sore to develop under the cast. Leave your cast uncovered until it is dry.
- If your cast gets wet, it will soften and may crumble or crack. Use plastic to protect your cast while you bathe. Double garbage bags work well for this. If your cast does get wet, call your doctor. The cast may need to be replaced.
- Do not paint the cast; this will close the cast's pores.
- Do not remove the cotton or padding inside your cast.

- If the edges of your cast are sharp or rub against your skin, put a waterproof tape on the edges. Apply the tape in small pieces. Make sure the tape is smooth to avoid irritation.
- Do not stuff cotton, toilet tissue or anything under the margins of the cast. This may fall into the cast and cause serious medical problems.
- Do not trim or cut down the length of the cast yourself.

## Skin Care

It is important to take care of the skin under your cast.

- Do not scratch under the cast. This may break the skin and cause an infection. To relieve itching under the cast, aim a hairdryer (on the "cool" setting) at the cast openings. If itching continues, call your doctor.
- You may have mild swelling of your exposed fingers or toes around the cast. You may reduce this swelling by:
  - raising your arm or leg higher than your heart
  - putting an ice bag on the swollen area.
- Bend and fully extend your fingers and toes to prevent swelling and joint stiffness 10 times every hour while you are awake.

*(over)*

## General Precautions

Follow your doctor's instructions about physical activity.

- Follow the weight bearing restrictions the doctor has given you.
- If your doctor 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.

## When To Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you notice any problems from your cast and if you feel any of the following symptoms:

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

Call your doctor if your cast is loose, cracked or broken. If you had an amputation and your cast falls off, put it back on and call your doctor.

## Cast Removal

Your doctor will remove the cast with a special cast saw that cuts the cast, but not the skin. This is fast and painless. Once the cast is off, your skin may be dry and flaky. Apply some lotion and add bath oil to your bath water. Your arm or leg may look thinner, but it will return to normal size with activity.

Your hair may grow faster on your casted arm or leg. The new hair is often darker, coarser and longer than normal. It will eventually return to normal.