

How to Care for Your Cast

Why do I need a cast?

You have been given a cast to help your broken bone or torn ligaments heal. A cast can help keep the injured area still so that your body can heal itself faster without risk of repeated injury. How long you'll need to wear your cast depends on the type of injury you have and how serious it is. Your doctor may want to check your cast one to three days after putting it on to be sure that the cast isn't too tight and that your broken bone or torn ligament is starting to heal.

Will the broken bone hurt?

Almost all broken bones cause pain. The cast should relieve some pain by limiting your movements. Your pain should become less severe each day. You should call your doctor immediately if the pain in the casted area is worse after the cast has been applied. You should also call your doctor right away if you have new pain that develops in another area (for example, pain in your fingers or forearm if you have a wrist or thumb injury; or pain in your toes or calf if you have an ankle or foot injury).

New pain that you didn't have before the injury may mean that the cast is too tight. If you have this symptom, raise your cast. This may reduce pain and swelling. Your doctor will probably want to see you right away to check the cast.

Is it okay to get the cast wet?

With some fiberglass casts, you can swim and bathe. However, most casts shouldn't get wet. If you have a cast that shouldn't get wet and it accidentally gets wet, irritation and even infection of the skin could develop. Ask your doctor which kind of cast you have.

To avoid getting the cast wet during bathing, you can put a plastic bag over the cast and hold it with a rubber band. If the cast does get wet, you may be able to dry out the inside padding with a blow-dryer. (Use a low setting and blow the air through the outside of the cast.) You should ask your doctor about using the blow-dryer before you try this.

What can I do about itching?

If your skin itches underneath the cast, don't slip anything inside the cast, since it may damage your skin and you could get an infection. Instead, try tapping or slapping the cast. You may also try scratching the same spot on the opposite arm or leg. Although it may not work, some people say it helps.



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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