



SPLINT AND CAST CARE INFORMATION

Splints and casts are designed to support and protect injured bones and soft tissue and help to reduce pain, swelling, and muscle spasm. They are applied following an injury, fracture, or after surgery. Both are custom-made and applied by your Orthopaedic Surgeon or Physician Assistant (PA) and must be cared for properly during your recovery.

This information packet is designed to help you cope with your injured extremity, and empower you to make good decisions about cast care for the entire duration of your recovery. We hope you have a quick recovery!

Remember to use common sense -- You have an injury and you must protect your cast from damage so it can protect your injury while it heals. Proper care will usually allow you to continue your daily activities with minimal inconvenience, and help to speed your overall recovery.

Take care of your cast and it will take care of you!

THESE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED IN THIS PACKET:

1. What is a splint or cast?
2. What materials are used in splints and casts?
3. My cast was "split" when it was put on. What does this mean?
4. Why does my limb feel so strange?
5. I have a "cast blister." What should I do?
6. What are some warning signs following splint or cast application?
7. How do you take care of your splint or cast?
8. Is it okay to get the cast wet?
9. How do I keep the cast dry?
10. My doctor gave me a "swimming cast." Can that get wet?
11. What can I do about itching?
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13. What should I expect after cast removal?
14. Once the cast is off, can I resume normal activities?
15. When should I call the doctor?
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1. What is a splint or cast?

Frequently, a splint is applied to a new injury first and then, as swelling goes down, a full cast may be used to replace the splint. Sometimes, it may be necessary to replace a cast as swelling decreases and the cast "gets too big." **Casts** can be made of plaster or fiberglass, and are wrapped around a limb. They do not allow for much swelling, and are often placed 1-2 weeks after a splint is used. **Splints** are also supportive and custom-made, but can expand slightly to accommodate a swollen limb. They are usually wrapped with an ACE bandage.

2. What materials are used in splints and casts?

Fiberglass or plaster materials can be used to form the hard, supportive layer in splints and casts. **Fiberglass** is lightweight, longer-lasting, "breathes" better than plaster, and is available in multiple colors. **Plaster** shapes better than fiberglass, making it ideal for splinting. Both materials come in strips or rolls, which are dipped in water and applied over a layer of cotton or synthetic padding covering the injured area. X-rays are used to check the healing process of an arm or leg and can "see through" the materials used for either a splint or cast.

3. My cast was "split" when it was put on. What does this mean?

Sometimes, a molded fiberglass cast is applied right after an injury. In order to allow for some swelling, it can be split once ("**univalved**") or twice ("**bivalved**") to allow it to expand safely. In a week or two, a new layer of fiberglass can be placed on top to "lock up" the cast for the rest of the treatment.

4. Why does my limb feel so strange?

Swelling from your injury may cause increased **pressure** inside your splint or cast for the first 48 to 72 hours. This may cause your splint to feel **snug** or **tight** around the injury. You may also feel **numbness** or **tingling** on the skin over your fingers or toes, which can be caused when the swelling fluid stretches out your skin nerves. These feelings usually begin to resolve once the swelling goes down in 3-4 days following the injury. Additionally, you may notice **bruising** or **discoloration** of your fingers and toes under the skin, caused by the injury. Here are some tips to help:

- **Elevate your injured arm or leg above your heart** by propping it up on pillows or some other support. You will have to recline if the splint or cast is on your leg. Elevation allows the clear swelling fluid (edema) and blood to drain "downhill" to your heart.
- Move your uninjured, but swollen fingers or toes gently and often.
- Apply ice to the splint or cast. Place the ice in a dry plastic bag or ice pack and loosely wrap it around the splint or cast at the level of the injury. Ice that is packed in a rigid container and touches the cast at only one point will not be effective. Do not allow it to leak into the cast as it melts.

5. I have a "cast blister." What should I do?

Most skin blisters occur at the ends of the cast, where friction happens between the cast's edge and your skin. If your skin is becoming irritated or reddened, the best way of preventing a blister is to rest and strictly limit your activities. If a blister develops, try placing a large band-aid or moleskin on the edge of the cast that is causing the irritation, then call your doctor for advice. If the blisters are severe, the cast may need to be trimmed or removed in the office.

6. What are some warning signs following splint or cast application?

Rest and elevation combine to greatly reduce pain and speed the healing process by minimizing early swelling. **Increased pain** may be caused by swelling; **Numbness and tingling** in your hand or foot may be caused by too much pressure on the nerves; **Burning and stinging** may be caused by pressure on the skin; **Bluish skin** may mean the cast is slowing your blood circulation.

If you begin to encounter these symptoms, do the following:

1. Rest and strictly elevate your limb above your heart for 15 minutes.
2. If there is no improvement, undo the ACE wrap to loosen the splint.
3. If you still cannot feel your fingers or toes, are unable to move them, have excruciating pain, or they stay cold and blue, then call your doctor IMMEDIATELY.

7. How do you take care of your splint or cast?

After you have adjusted to your splint or cast for a few days, it is important to keep it in good condition. This will help your recovery.

- Keep food, dirt, sand, and powders away from the inside of your splint or cast.
- Do not pull out the padding from your splint or cast.
- Do not stick objects (such as coat hangers or rulers) inside the cast to scratch itching skin!
- Do not break off rough edges or trim the cast before asking your doctor.
- Inspect the skin around the cast, especially at the edges. If your skin becomes red or raw around the cast, contact your doctor.
- Inspect the cast regularly. If it cracks or develops soft spots, contact your doctor's office.

8. Is it okay to get the cast wet?

Most casts and splints **should NOT get wet**. If you get yours wet, the cotton padding layer will likely stay moist, causing irritation or an infection of the skin to develop. If your cast gets wet, call your doctor's office immediately, as it will likely need to be changed.

9. How do I keep the cast dry?

There are a variety of commercially available cast protectors that can be purchased from pharmacies or medical supply stores (see the list on last page), but most people can use simple, inexpensive materials to protect their cast. To avoid getting the cast wet during bathing, follow these easy steps:

1. Place a plastic bag over the cast and hold it with a rubber band.
2. Use tape to seal the bag directly to your skin above the cast.
3. Finally, place a SECOND bag and tape it to the skin a bit higher up.

10. My doctor gave me a "swimming cast." Can that get wet?

Yes, this is the only type of cast that can get wet without a protective cover. It has special a "quick-drying" sock and synthetic padding that wicks moisture away from the skin. You do not need to seal it with a bag before swimming or bathing. For more information, visit www.castliner.com

11. What can I do about itching?

Itching is very common underneath a cast. If your skin itches underneath the cast, don't stick anything inside the cast, since it can get stuck or damage your skin, leading to an infection. Instead, try some of the following solutions:

- For young children, try distracting them with play activities to take their mind off the itching.
- Decrease your activity level and rest, since skin sweating can make you itch.
- Move indoors to a cool, air-conditioned room.
- Lightly tap the cast to help distract from the itching.
- Blow COOL air from a blow-dryer down into the cast.
- Take a small dose of Benadryl by mouth if the itching becomes severe.

12. How is a cast removed?

NEVER remove the cast yourself, since you may cut your skin or prevent proper healing of your injury. Only a trained orthopaedic specialist should place or remove a cast. Your doctor will use a special "cast saw" to remove your cast. **The cast saw vibrates, but does not rotate.** When the blade of the saw touches the padding inside the hard shell of the cast, the padding will vibrate with the blade and will protect your skin. Cast saws make lots of noise and may feel "hot" from friction. They are often connected to a vacuum cleaner, which helps both to suck up the dust generated from cutting the cast and keep the blade cool.

13. What should I expect after cast removal?

Once the cast is cut off at your doctor's office, you will be allowed to gently wash your skin for the first time in many weeks. There may be a smelly odor or dry, flaky skin, which are both normal and are usually just your own skin. Your muscles may have gotten a little smaller from being in the cast, but don't worry – they will grow back to normal size in a few weeks! Lastly, for ladies, your leg may have some unwanted hair on it after being in a leg cast, but again, this is normal and is not a cause for concern.

14. Once the cast is off, can I resume normal activities?

Most likely, your doctor will order new X-Rays to check up on how your injury is healing. Since every injury is different, your doctor will make a determination about advancing your weight bearing and physical activities (such as gym, sports, and workouts) based on how well the injury has healed.

15. When should I call the doctor?

Please call our office immediately if you develop any of the following problems:

- Excruciating pain or numbness of the fingers or toes while in the cast.
- Blue fingers or toes that do not improve with rest and elevation.
- Skin blisters at the edges of the cast.
- Softening, cracks, or breaks in the cast material.
- If any object becomes "stuck" inside the cast.
- If a "dry" cast becomes moist or wet.
- Unusual or foul odors coming from the cast.

What commercial products are available to help with cast care?

There are many innovative accessories that have been developed to make cast care safer, more comfortable, and more fun. Please note that we are not financially affiliated with any of these companies. The products and prices are listed here to simplify your search. Please visit each company's website to learn more about their products:

A sample listing of some cast accessory companies:

PROTECTIVE CAST COVERS:

www.xerosox.com

Waterproof Heavy-Duty Surgical Latex Covers with Hand Pump Sealer (~\$35)

www.medcareproducts.com/castcovers

Waterproof DryCast Slip-On Covers, Swimming Covers,
and P.A.L.S Outdoor Weather Coverings (~\$7 to \$36)

www.drycorp.com

Waterproof DryPro Cast Cover with Vacuum Seal (~\$35)

www.thecastprotector.com

Foam Padded Arm Cast Cover for High School/College Sports Participation (~\$50)
(*** Use only if advised by your surgeon to participate in competitive sports with a cast ***)

CVS and **Walgreens** pharmacies also sell a variety of protective cast covers,
such as the "ShowerSafe" and "Seal-Tight" brands (~\$12-24)

www.darcointernational.com

"Body Armor" Flexible Cast Shoe: Soft Rubber Material with Bungee Closure (~\$20)

CAST COMFORT PRODUCTS:

www.medcareproducts.com/castcovers

Cast Comfort Alcohol Spray (~\$16)

(*** Do NOT use if you have surgical incisions, skin tears, or open wounds ***)

www.castcooler.com

Connects your cast to a Vacuum hose to Keep Cast Dry, Comfort Skin, and Stop Itching (~\$30)

DECORATIVE CAST PRODUCTS:

www.casttoos.com

Artistic Tattoo-like designs that adhere to the surface of a cast with a blow-dryer (~\$20-40)

www.shrinkableskins.com

Breathable shrink-wraps in fun designs that fit over and protect fiberglass casts (~\$11)