

InfoSheet – Cast and Splint Care

David M. Klein, MD – Kennedy - White Orthopaedic Center

WHAT IS A CAST?

A cast is a hard, fitted covering used to immobilize and support an injured part of the body. They are used during the healing process of broken bones and soft tissues. Casts are typically made of a rigid material, such as plaster or fiberglass. They are custom-fitted to your body to provide the best support possible.

WHY DO I NEED A CAST?

When your body is mending, it is working to repair damaged areas and make new healthy bone or tissue. The cast will hold the area in the correct position while it heals. It also helps prevent re-injury to the area that can result from too much movement. Pain and swelling are greatly reduced through the supportive protection provided by a cast.

HOW IS THE CAST APPLIED?

Your doctor or other healthcare provider will first place a layer of padding on the area. This will help protect your skin while you are wearing the cast. Next, the cast material is wetted and applied in strips or rolled on (like a bandage). Often, the joint above and below the affected area is covered as well to limit excessive movement. Once the area is covered, it is allowed to dry and harden. Fiberglass casts need about an hour to completely harden. Plaster casts may require a few days before they are fully rigid.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER THE CAST IS APPLIED?

For the first few days, you should focus on making yourself comfortable with the

cast. Keeping the casted area elevated will help keep swelling down. You can apply ice packs (wrapped in plastic to prevent wetting the cast) to the area to further reduce pain and swelling. Your doctor will show you how to gently exercise the area to prevent joint stiffness.

HOW DO I TAKE CARE OF MY CAST?

- Avoid bearing weight on the cast until it has completely hardened. Your doctor will inform as to how much weight the cast can sustain during your daily activities.
- Avoid excessive heat and moisture. Do not use a heating pad on your cast. Take measures to keep the cast dry. For example, double bag the cast or apply a waterproof shield before bathing.
- Keep the inside of the cast as clean as possible. This will reduce your likelihood of developing skin irritation. Avoid activities that can cause dirt and other contaminants to lodge inside the cast.
- Do not put objects inside the cast to scratch the skin. You can injure your skin this way, which may lead to infection.

WHAT SHOULD I BE AWARE OF WHILE WEARING THE CAST?

Casts can sometimes cause skin and circulatory problems if they are not properly monitored. Report problems to your healthcare provider if you notice:

- Excessive swelling in the affected area (some swelling is normal)
- Discoloration of the fingers or toes (blueness, whiteness) While a

change in color is expected, too much may mean the cast is too tight

- Numbness or tingling in the area, especially if you lose feeling in the fingers or toes
- Inability to move the fingers or toes in the injured area
- Pain that worsens instead of improving
- Pain in the forearm or leg when having your fingers or toes passively bent and straightened (“*pain on passive motion*”)

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WEAR THE CAST?

The length of time you will have to wear the cast will vary according to your injury or surgery. You may need the cast until the area has healed as proven by X-ray. Talk with your doctor regarding the expected recovery time with your injury.

HOW IS THE CAST REMOVED?

A specialized cast saw will be used to remove your cast. The saw does not spin, but vibrates and makes quite a bit of noise. It should not harm your skin.

