

# Let's Talk About...

## Cast Care

### What is a cast?

A cast is a big, hard bandage that's usually made of fiberglass or plaster. Casts keep bones in place while they heal.

Kids usually get casts for broken bones. They may also need a cast to help bones and surrounding tissues grow properly, or to aid healing after a bone surgery.

A cast wraps around the broken area and needs to be removed by a doctor when the bone is healed. A cast may be needed for as little as 4 weeks or as long as 10 weeks.

Because a cast helps your child heal from an injury and prevent infection, it is important to practice proper cast care.

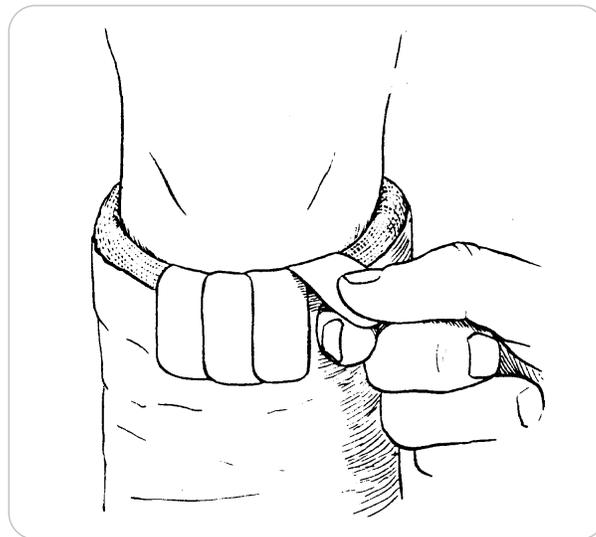
### How do I take care of a cast?

- 1 Keep a fiberglass cast as clean and dry as possible, or it will get soft or crack. If the cast cracks or loses its shape, call your child's doctor.
- 2 Use a damp cloth to clean the cast if it gets dirty. Keep the clean area uncovered until it dries.
- 3 Don't allow friends and family to paint on the cast. They can write on it with markers instead.

### How do I care for my child's skin?

To protect your child's skin:

- **Elevate your child's cast for the first 24 hours.** Put ice bags wrapped in a towel on the sides or top of the cast. The cold will also help to prevent swelling.
- **Soften rough edges by placing 1-inch strips of adhesive tape or moleskin or the rough patch after the cast is completely dry.** Then trim the tape corners so the edges don't roll (see the illustration). Tape the cast as soon as possible to prevent skin damage.



- **Change your child's position often so they don't have constant pressure on one skin area.** If your child has a leg cast, put pillows under their calf to prevent pressure sores and give them support.
- **Check your child's skin for red or swollen areas or sores.** Change your child's position to remove the pressure if there are any red areas. If the area stays red for 30 minutes after removing pressure, call your child's doctor.
- **Pay attention to bad odors inside the cast.** A bad odor may mean your child's skin is infected. If you think this is the case, call your child's doctor.
- **Don't let your child stick any object under the cast.** This can injure the skin or shift the padding inside the cast.
- **Use only your fingertips to reach into the cast if your child is itchy.** Rub the skin gently. If itching continues, use a hair dryer, set on cool, to blow air into the cast.
- **Don't use lotion or powder at the edges of the cast.** It can build up or irritate the skin.

## How do I protect my child while they're wearing the cast?

- Give your child sponge baths instead of tub baths or showers. To prevent the cast from getting wet, wrap the cast in plastic wrap and towels. Wash all the skin not covered by the cast.
- Make sure your child uses their sling (if they have one) whenever walking around to protect the cast.
- Use crib safety rails for babies wearing casts.
- A small child may lose their balance and fall with the extra weight of the cast.
- Have your child wear a large smock or shirt to keep food and crumbs from falling into the cast.

## What can my child do while wearing a cast?

While your child may not be able to play sports or be active, they can do many other things, including:

- Taking short walks outside or riding in a wagon or stroller
- Listening to music or audiobooks
- Reading books or magazines
- Visiting with friends
- Playing with toys or putting puzzles together (avoid small toys that could fall into the cast)

Your child's doctor will tell you about specific activities your child can do.

## What should my child eat while wearing a cast?

Your child should eat fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains while wearing the cast to prevent constipation and urinary tract infections. They should also drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

## How will the doctor take off the cast?

To remove your child's cast, the doctor will use a cast cutter that looks like a small rotary saw. It will not cut the skin, but it is noisy and has lots of vibrations.

After the cast is off, gently rub your child's skin with warm, soapy water. Then rinse and dry it. You might need to apply some lotion.

The body part that had the cast will feel weak and flabby and look thinner. It will return to normal once your child begins using it again and exercising.

### When should I call my child's doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child's cast is too tight. This may cause:

- Numbness, tingling, or burning inside the cast
- Bluish or pale skin color
- Skin that's cold to the touch
- Swelling that doesn't go away when you elevate the cast
- Severe pain that doesn't go away with medicine

You should also call your child's doctor if the cast is too loose, because it won't help the broken bone to heal.

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