Let's Talk About ...

Cast Care

Casts are used for many reasons. They can keep a body part from moving, keep a body part in the proper position for healing, correct a deformity, or decrease pain by keeping a body part still.

How do I take care of a cast?

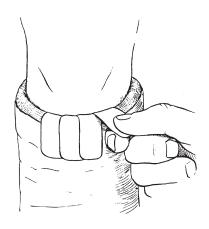
- 1 A fiberglass cast should dry in 5–30 minutes. After the cast is dry, keep it dry or it will get soft or crack. Keep the cast as clean and dry as possible. Call your doctor's office if the cast cracks or loses its shape.
- **2** If the cast gets dirty, use a damp washcloth to clean it. Then keep the cleaned area uncovered until it is dry. Do not cover it with clothing until it is dry.
- **3** Friends may write on the cast, but do not paint the entire cast.

How do I care for my child's skin?

There are ways to protect your child's skin from getting irritated:

- For the first 24 hours after your child receives the cast, elevate the casted body part. This prevents swelling. Ice helps, too. Place ice bags to the sides of the cast, not on top of it.
- After the cast is completely dry, soften the rough edges by taping over the edge with 1-inch strips of adhesive tape or moleskin. Trim the tape corners, as shown in the illustration, so the edges do not roll. Do this as soon as possible to prevent skin damage and breakdown.
- Change your child's position often. This will decrease constant pressure on any one skin area.

- For leg casts, place pillows under the calf for support and to prevent pressure sores.
- Every day, check your child's skin for red or swollen areas, breaks in the skin, or bad odors from inside the cast. If there are any red areas, change your child's position so the pressure is removed. If the area stays red for 30 minutes after the pressure is removed, call your doctor.
- Do not allow your child to stick any object under the cast. This can injure the skin.
- If your child complains of severe itching underneath the cast, use your fingertips only to reach into the cast. Rub the skin gently. If itching continues, use a hair dryer, set on cool, to blow air into the cast.
- Give your child sponge baths instead of shower or tub baths. Don't get the cast wet. Use a plastic wrap and towels to protect the cast. Wash all the skin that is not covered by the cast. Do not use lotion or powder at the edges of the cast because it can "cake up" or cause irritation by making the skin softer.



 If your child is a baby, use crib safety rails. The weight of the cast may cause your child to get off balance and fall.

What can my child do?

Your doctor will give you more specific instructions about the activities your child can do. If your child's arm is casted, he should use the sling whenever he is up and about. Here are some ideas to help your child stay happy when he cannot do his usual activities:

- If your child needs to stay in bed or play quietly, plan enjoyable play activities.
- Take your child outside in a wagon, stroller, or reclining wheelchair to get fresh air and contact with the outside world.
- Borrow books, records, and tapes from the library.
- Encourage visits from your child's friends. Plan quiet group activities.
- Have toys, TV, video games, water, and a bell within your child's reach. Do not give your child small toys that could get caught inside the cast.
- Small children need to be held as often as possible. The closeness and touching are soothing.

What should my child eat?

It is important for your child to have good nutrition while the cast is on. To keep your child from getting constipation or a urinary tract infection, encourage him to eat fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain breads, and drink plenty of water and juices.

Before eating, put a large smock or shirt on your child to keep food and crumbs from falling down into the cast. If he is in a body cast, remember to prop him upright to prevent choking when eating or drinking.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if your child's cast is too tight or too loose. Check this every day. A cast that is too loose will not do its job. A cast that is too tight can decrease blood supply and cause damage to the nerves in the body part. Signs of decreased blood supply to the body part are:

- Numbness, tingling, or burning.
- Change in skin color to bluish, or pale.
- · Cold to touch.
- Swelling that does not go away when you elevate the casted part.
- Severe pain that does not go away with medicine.

How will the doctor take off the 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, clean the skin with soapy water and gentle rubbing, rinse, and dry. You might need to apply some lotion.

The casted body part will feel weak and flabby, and look thinner. Through exercise and use it will return to normal.

Remember your doctor's instructions may be different. It is important to follow your doctor's instructions. Call your doctor if you have any questions.

