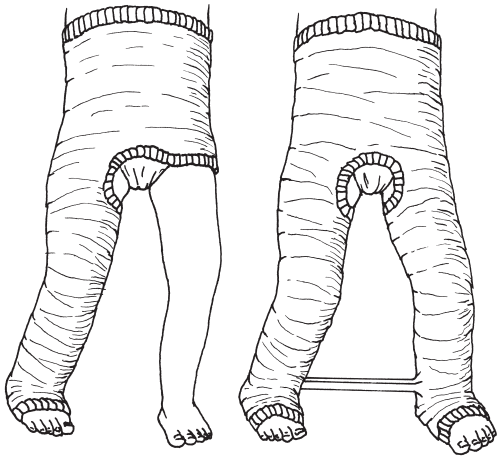
Let's Talk About...

# Hip Spica Cast

Your child has a hip spica cast. The purpose of the cast is to keep his body still. This is to heal bones and tendons properly or correct a deformity. Hip spica casts begin at the chest. The cast may reach down to cover one leg and foot or both legs and feet (see picture). Your child's cast is chosen according to his age and what is being treated.



## What can I expect when I take my child home from the hospital?

You will need help to get your child home in a car seat. Talk to your nurse about this. Your child needs to lie down. This will decrease swelling after the cast is on. He may lie either on his back, side, or stomach as long as his head is raised and the cast is supported. After one or two days of bed rest, you may hold him in an upright position. At all times, protect him from rolling or falling. Don't let him stand or walk in the cast unless your doctor says it is OK.

Another way to prevent swelling is to raise the cast. Ice is also helpful during the first 24 hours. Place ice bags to the sides of the cast, not on top.

During the time your child is in a hip spica cast, turn him every two to four hours during the day, and at least once a night. You can use pillows, blankets, or towels for support and to keep too much pressure from harming areas on his body. When turning your child, support his joints. The joints act as pressure points on the cast and may break or crack it.

Check every day to make sure the cast is not too tight or too loose. If your child says it is tight or he feels pain, tingling, or cannot feel at all, try raising his legs for an hour or more. If your child does not speak, look to see if he can move his toes. If he cannot move his toes or there is swelling, raise his legs for an hour or more. If the problem continues, call your doctor. A cast that is too tight can cut off the blood supply to the leg or damage nerves.

Your child's toes should be pink and feel warm. Call your doctor if his toes become swollen or discolored or if they cannot be moved easily. Always secure your child in chairs, beds, car seats, and onto couches. The weight of the cast may cause him to become off balance and fall. Always use crib safety rails if he is young enough to use a crib. You will need a special car seat or vest. The physical therapist can help you obtain the right car seat for your child.

## How do I take care of my child's skin?

1. Check your child's skin every day 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 to remove the pressure on that area. If the area stays red for 30 minutes after the pressure is removed, call your doctor. If you notice bad odors or breaks in the skin, call your doctor.

2. Do not allow your child to stick any objects under the cast. This may injure the skin. If your child is very itchy underneath the cast, use your fingertips only to reach into the cast. Rub the skin gently. If this doesn't help, use a hair dryer set on cool to blow air into the cast.
3. Instead of a shower or tub bath, you can give your child a sponge bath every day. Make sure the cast does not get wet. Use plastic wrap and towels to protect the cast. Wash all skin not covered by the cast. Do not use lotion or powder at the cast edges. These may "cake up" or cause irritation by making the skin softer.

## How do I take care of the cast?

1. Right after surgery, your child's nurse will cover the cast with a soft material. This needs to be done as soon as possible to prevent skin breakdown and trauma. Keep the cast as clean and dry as possible. If the cast gets wet, it may soften or crack and lose its proper shape. Call your doctor if this happens.
2. If the cast becomes dirty, use a damp washcloth to clean the area. Keep the area uncovered until it is completely dry. Friends may write on the cast, but do not paint the entire cast.
3. If plastic is used around the edges of the cast, make sure the plastic cannot be pulled off. Plastic can cause suffocation or choking.

## What activities can my child do?

Since your child needs to be in bed or play quietly, you should 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 and tapes from the library.
- Encourage your child's friends to visit and plan quiet group activities.
- Have toys, TV, video games, water, and a bell within your child's reach. Remember; do not give your child small toys that can get caught inside the cast.
- Small children need to be held as often as possible. The closeness and touching soothes them.

## How can my child go to the bathroom?

The key to keeping the cast clean and dry is to use the proper position. Keep your child's head and upper body propped up higher than his feet to help drain urine and bowel movements away from the cast. You can do this with pillows or folded blankets, or with something under the crib mattress to raise the head off the bed.

If your child is not toilet trained, use a diaper to protect the cast. The diaper must be changed as soon as it becomes wet. Use a disposable diaper if possible. The diaper may need to be cut smaller to fit properly. Tuck the diaper into the cast. You can place a sanitary napkin inside the diaper for extra absorbency.

A special bedpan called a fracture bedpan may be useful. It has a flattened end that you can place under your child's buttocks. Ask your nurse for this bedpan before you leave the hospital. Here are directions to use the fracture bedpan:

- Turn your child to the side opposite the injured side or surgical site.
- Place the bedpan under your child's buttocks, then turn him back onto the bedpan. Check between his thighs to make sure the bedpan is properly placed.
- Keep your child's head and upper body raised so the urine flows down and away from the cast.

## What can my child wear?

Let your child wear familiar clothing. Skirts or dresses may be the most comfortable for girls. Large sweat pants or shorts can be worn by either girls or boys. Your child can wear underwear a few sizes larger than normal over the cast. Babies or very young children may be dressed in sleepers a few sizes larger, with snaps at the crotch and at both legs. In cold weather, cover your child's toes with large socks that fit over the foot of the cast.

## What can my child eat?

It is important for your child to have good nutrition while the cast is on. To keep your child from getting problems like constipation, encourage him to eat fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads, and drink plenty of water and juices. To keep the cast from feeling tight over the stomach, have your child eat small meals often rather than three big meals.

Before eating, put a large towel, smock, or shirt on your child to prevent food and crumbs from falling down into the cast.

## Call your doctor if…

- Your child has severe pain, loss of feeling, or burning inside or below the cast which is not relieved with medicine, raising the casted area, or rest.
- The cast is tight or there is swelling that is not relieved by raising the casted area and rest.
- The toes on the cast side are colder or more discolored than the toes on the opposite side.
- Your child has more and more trouble moving toes on the cast side compared to the other side.
- Your child has a fever (temperature greater than 101° F).
- There is an unusually foul odor coming from the inside.
- There is broken, blistered, or irritated skin around the cast edges.
- The cast is cracked, broken, or loose.
- There is a foreign object inside the cast that you cannot get out with your fingers.

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*Also available in Spanish.*