
What is a shoulder spica?

A shoulder spica is a cast that fits around your child's chest, shoulder and arm. This helps keep your child's shoulder in a certain position to keep it from moving. A shoulder spica cast:

- Is used for certain fractures (breaks in the bone) of the shoulder.
- Helps improve shoulder movement when Botox is used to loosen muscles.
- Protects the shoulder after surgery.

If your child is having surgery, then they will get their shoulder spica before they wake up from anesthesia (medicine to make them sleep).

Skin protection

Your child's cast should have a comfortable fit. If it is uncomfortable, it may cause rubbing. Your child's cast has extra padding to help. If it still rubs, your child is at risk for a pressure sore. You will need to check the site under the padding every day.

Common places where rubbing could happen are the:

- Top of the shoulder
- Back of the hand
- Chest
- Back
- Pelvis (the lower part of the belly between the hip bones)

Other signs your child's cast is too tight include:

- Trouble taking in a deep breath
- Pressure on the belly after a meal

Call your child's doctor if your child's cast is too tight or itchy.

- Do not put anything down the cast to scratch. This could also cause a pressure sore.
- Do not change or cut the cast. It is important to keep it intact.

Cast care

Your child's cast must stay dry. You may use either a damp piece of flannel or baby wipes to wipe your child's visible skin. Please make sure you dry your child's skin all the way.

- Do not let your child take a bath or shower. Do not place your child in the bathtub or sink. This will damage your child's cast.
- Your child may take a sponge bath only. Put plastic bags over your child's cast. Use waterproof tape for the edges to keep the cast dry during the sponge bath.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Shoulder spica cast, continued

- Check your child's skin during the sponge bath. Look for spots that rub, such as between the thumb and index (pointer) finger.
- Do not use talcum powder or creams. These will become gritty when mixed with sweat. This could bother your child's skin and cause a pressure sore or infection.
- Check your child's cast for sharp edges. If you find a sharp edge, put mole skin or other padding between the cast and your child's skin. This will help protect your child's skin.

What clothes should my child wear?

Your child may need to wear larger-sized clothes, such as baggy t-shirts and jumpers. It will be easier for these to go over the cast. You may also alter your child's clothes by splitting the side seam and adding Velcro closures.

How should my child sleep?

Some guidelines include:

- Lay your child flat on their back to sleep. Use a pillow under their head and upper body for support.
- Your child may also lie on their non-operated side. It will be hard for them to lie on their operated side.

How should I feed my child?

Your child's cast should not affect their diet much.

- Cover your child's cast with a towel while they eat. This will help keep the cast clean.
- Your child may eat and drink like normal.
- Your child should avoid fizzy drinks and very large meals. These could make your child feel bloated inside the cast.

Does my child need to limit physical activity?

It is important for your child to stay moving and active, even if it is only gentle walking. Talk with your child's doctor about specific activities your child wants to keep doing while wearing a cast.

What else do I need to know?

Do:

- Call your child's doctor if you have any concerns.
- Let your child move around as much as possible during the day. Change their position often to prevent pressure to any one area.
- Make sure your child moves their fingers to help prevent stiffness.
- Check your child's skin around the edges of the cast often.
- It is important to prevent pressure sores. Call your child's doctor if you see redness or broken skin.

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Do NOT:

- Try to remove, change or adjust your child's spica cast.
- Let your child drive while they have a cast.
- Use any talcum powders or creams under the cast. This can damage the cast. It can also create dampness and possible sores.
- Let your child sit close to a fire. The cast may become hot and burn their skin.

How will I know the cast is not too tight?

Make sure your child's cast is not too tight. Blood needs to flow well to all body parts around the cast. Check the fit of your child's cast every 8 hours (or more often if needed). Do this for the first 1 to 2 days. Check your child for these things:

- Finger movement. Have your child move or wiggle their fingers often.
- Sensation (feeling). Touch the area above and below the cast several times each day. Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child complains of numbness, tingling or pain.
- Blood flow (circulation). Press briefly on each of your child's fingernails. When it turns white, let go. Call your child's doctor **right away** if the pink color does not return within 3 seconds.
- Temperature. If any of your child's fingers are cold, cover them with a blanket or sock. Check again in 20 minutes. If any of his fingers are still cold, check for feeling and blood flow. Call your child's doctor **right away** if you think there may be a problem.
- Severe swelling. Look for swelling above and below the cast at least 1 time each day. A little swelling is normal, but a lot of swelling is not. If there is swelling, watch it closely. Call your child's doctor if the swelling does not go down.
- Pain that is not controlled. Call your child's doctor **right away** if the medicine ordered does not help your child's pain.

What can I do about itching?

Do not let your child put anything inside the cast to scratch. This could hurt their skin and lead to infection. You may use a hair dryer or fan on cool setting to blow cool air under the cast.

What do I need to know about travel?

After surgery, it is safe for your child to use their current car seat. Check that your child has a correct fit in their car seat before the day of surgery. A special car seat or vest is rarely needed.

- Part of a correct fit is based on the width of your child's shoulders.
- Sit your child with their back and bottom against the back of the car seat. Your child's shoulders should fit easily within the shell at the upper part of the car seat.
 - The cast will be stiff and may take up a little more space at the shoulders. The cast should not change your child's fit in the car seat (unless the car seat was too narrow before surgery).

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- If your child’s shoulders fit snugly within the shell of their current car seat, please bring a different car seat for the day of surgery and for the recovery time after surgery.
- If your child uses a forward facing car seat:
 - The internal harness straps should fit at or just above shoulder level.
 - The chest clip should be at armpit level. This is the same as before surgery and the cast.
- If your child uses a booster seat:
 - The seat belt will cross their shoulder between their neck and arm.
 - The lap belt should lay as low as possible and touch your child’s thighs.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child’s doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Numbness or tingling around the cast
- New or different pain
- Pain that does not get better with medicine
- Change in skin color above or below the cast
- Red or irritated skin
- New sores
- Bad smell from inside the cast
- New blood stain on the cast after 2 days
- Cast gets loose, broken, cracked or soft
- A wet cast that does not dry all the way
- Something stuck inside the cast

Also call if you have questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

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Shoulder spica cast, continued

Your checklist

This list can help you keep track of what you need to know about your child's cast. Ask your child's nurse, therapist or doctor for help if you need more details.

Before your child goes home, make sure you know:

- Why your child has a shoulder spica cast.
- How to wash your hands before and after you do cast care.
- How to:
 - “Petal” the cast.
 - Help with itching.
 - Give your child a sponge bath.
 - Dry your child's skin and cast.
- How to check your child's finger or skin for:
 - Good blood flow
 - Good sensation
 - Skin problems
 - Infection
- How to move and position your child.
- How to get supplies.
- When to call your child's doctor.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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