

Spica cast care

Patient and Family Education

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.

What is a spica cast?

A spica cast (body cast) is a type of hard splint made of plaster or fiberglass. It surrounds an injured or repaired body part to help:

- Prevent movement.
- Protect it.
- Keep it in a correct position until it heals.

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child's cast. Below are some general guidelines for cast care.

How can I keep the cast clean and dry?

- As soon as the cast dries (about 45 minutes for fiberglass and 24 hours for plaster), your child's nurse will show you how to "petal" or reinforce the cast edges to keep them clean, dry and smooth.
- Keep the rough edges of the cast covered with moleskin. Waterproof tape is used to cover the moleskin in the diaper area to prevent soiling.
- Cover the cast with a towel, or use a bib when your child is eating. This helps prevent food and drink from spilling on or into the cast.
- If the cast becomes dirty, clean it with a slightly damp cloth with soap. Baby wipes also work well. Be sure to wipe off any moisture. Allow the cast to air-dry, or use a hair dryer set on **cool** setting.

How will I know the cast is not too tight?

Make sure the cast is not too tight so blood can flow well to all body parts around the cast. Every eight hours or more often if needed, be sure to check:

- **Movement of toes and fingers.** Have your child move or wiggle his fingers and toes often.
- **Sensation (feeling):** Touch the area above and below the cast several times a day. Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child complains of numbness, tingling or pain.
- **Bloodflow (circulation):** Press briefly on each of your child's large toenails several times a day. When it turns white, let go. If pink color does not return in three seconds, call your child's doctor **right away**.
- **Temperature:** If either of your child's feet is cold, cover it with a blanket or sock, or raise it above the level of the heart. Check it again in 20 minutes; if it is still cold, check feeling and bloodflow. If you think there may be a problem, call your child's doctor **right away**.
- **Severe swelling:** Look for swelling above and below the cast several times each day. A little swelling is normal, but a lot of swelling is not. If there is swelling, raise it higher than the level of the heart for an hour. Watch it closely, and call your child's doctor if the swelling does not go down.
- **Uncontrolled pain:** If the medicine ordered does not help your child's pain, call your child's doctor **right away**.

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

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Checking blood flow

How should I bathe my child?

- Keep your child's cast dry at all times.
- Sponge bathe your child each day. Wash all his skin not covered by the cast with soap and water each day. Protect the cast with towels or plastic trash bags during the bath.
- Do not use lotions, oils or powders around the edges or under the cast. They soften the skin, making it prone to irritation or breakdown and can lead to infection. Powder may cake up and do the same thing.
- Check your child's skin at least four times a day for redness and irritation.

What about eating?

- Raise your child's head up higher than his hips. Use pillows to raise his head and chest area as needed. Or, place him on his stomach with his head and chest raised.
- Cover the cast with a large T-shirt or towel during meals.
- Make sure food is cut into small pieces to help prevent choking.
- The first few weeks after surgery may not be the right time to add new foods to your child's diet. This can help avoid vomiting and diarrhea (loose stools).

What should I do about diapering and toileting?

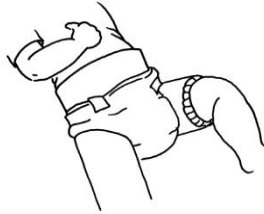
- If your child is in diapers, tuck a smaller size disposable diaper than usually used between his skin and the cast. The plastic backing should be next to the cast's inside surface and the cotton side next to his skin. A sanitary napkin can be placed inside the small diaper to absorb even more. Put a larger diaper on top to keep it in place.
- Check diapers often, and change as soon as soiled.
- For older children:
 - Raise your child's head slightly higher than his hips to help urine and stool drain downward. Use pillows to raise his head and chest area as needed.
 - Boys can use a urinal.
 - For girls, make a "wick" from several layers of toilet paper and place the wick over the bedpan so it directs the stream of urine into the bedpan or commode. This helps keep urine from splashing the sides of the cast.

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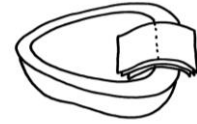
Spica cast care, continued



Tuck a small diaper next to the skin.



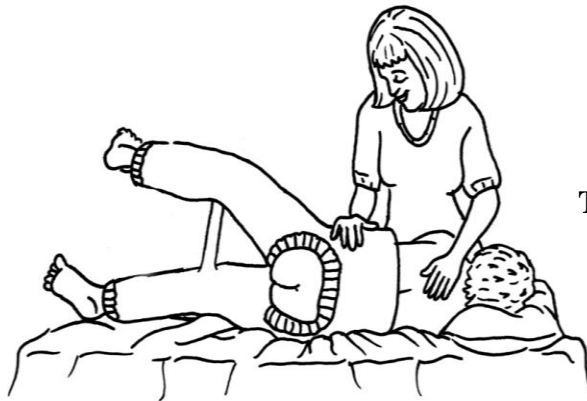
Place a large diaper on top.



Make a “wick” of toilet paper.

What should I do about moving and positioning?

- Change your child’s position every two to four hours during the day and at least once a night. This helps keep pressure off the skin to help prevent pressure sores and skin problems.
- **Never** use the bar between the legs to turn or lift your child. Doing so can damage the cast.
- Use pillows or rolled blankets for support.
- Small children may fit into a wagon or stroller padded with pillows.
- Older children can use a reclining (moveable back) wheelchair.
- A reclining outdoor lounge chair may be used as a portable bed.
- Avoid knocking the cast against things. Check often for cracks, breaks, dents, tightness or looseness. Call your child’s doctor **right away** if you notice any of these.



Turning your child

How can I help keep my child comfortable?

Use pillows and rolled blankets to help keep your child comfortable. He can be on his back, side or tummy.

What can I do about itching?

- **DO NOT** let your child put anything inside the cast to scratch. This could hurt his skin and lead to infection.
- Change your child’s position often to shift the weight of the cast.
- Use a hair dryer to blow **cool** air under the cast.

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Spica cast care, continued

- Help get your child's mind off the cast. You can use such things as play, books, music, TV or videos.
- If nothing works, ask your doctor about medicine for itching.

What can I do to help prevent boredom?

Your child can take part in many “quiet” activities, such as:

- Toys. Make sure toys are big enough so they cannot get stuck inside the cast.
- Books, video games, TV, music and storytelling
- Art projects
- Visits with friends
- Family activities

What about school and outside activities?

- Call your child's teachers to arrange for home study and return to classes as soon as possible.
- Your child can continue to go to scouts, clubs and other social activities. He can watch his team play at sporting events.

What about travel?

- Ask your caregiver **before you leave the hospital** about safety vests and special car seats made for children in spica casts.
- Place your child in the back seat of the car to use the vest or car seat.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has any of the following:

- Complains of numbness or tingling in his feet or around the cast
- Complains of pain that is different from what he has had before
- Complains of pain that does not get better with medicine ordered by his doctor
- Swelling of the feet or toes that do not “pink up” after 20 minutes of raising them higher than the level of the heart
- Decrease or loss of movement in the toes
- Change in skin color above or below the cast
- Skin becomes red or irritated, or sores develop
- Bad smell from inside the cast
- New blood stain on the cast after two days
- Fever over 100.5°F for longer than 24 hours with no other symptoms
- Cast becomes loose, broken, cracked or soft
- A wet cast that does not dry completely
- Something stuck in the cast

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Your checklist

This list can help you keep track of what you need to know about your child’s cast or spica cast before your child goes home. Ask your child’s nurse, therapist or doctor for help if you need more information.

Before your child goes home, make sure that you know:

- Why your child has a spica cast.
- How to wash your hands before and after giving your child cast care.
- How to:
 - “Petal” the cast.
 - Relieve itching.
 - Give your child a sponge bath.
 - Dry your child’s skin and cast.
 - Diaper or toilet your child.
- How to check your child’s fingers, toes or skin for:
 - Good bloodflow.
 - Good nerve sensation.
 - Skin problems.
 - Infection.
- How to:
 - Move and position your child.
 - Use a safety vest or special car seat as needed.
- How to obtain supplies.
- When to call the doctor or healthcare provider with questions or problems.

Notes _____

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