

Cast Care

The purpose of your cast is to keep your injury from moving so there is less pain and to promote healing. Most casts are made of fiberglass.

What to expect when the cast is applied:

Stockinette, a sock like material, will be put over your injured limb. Stockinette is used to provide a cushioned finished edge to your cast. Next, a soft cotton material (soft-roll) is wrapped in layers around the stockinette. Gauze rolls of fiberglass or plaster are then applied and molded to the shape of your injured limb. The casting material will begin to feel warm as it is applied. For the cast to harden, a chemical reaction occurs that results in the warmth you feel. This warmth will not burn your skin. Regardless of the type of material used for your cast, it will harden and set in 5 to 10 minutes. If you have a leg cast on that is not made of plaster, you can walk on your cast in 20 to 30 minutes if your doctor allows you to put weight on your leg.

How to care for your cast:

- Avoid getting your cast wet. Although the cast material will not soften or come apart, cotton under the cast is very hard to get dry. Wet stockinette can cause your skin to breakdown. If your cast gets wet, use a hair dryer on low setting to dry your cast. Do not hold the dryer in a spot too long or it will burn the skin. It may take up to two hours to dry.

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Learn more about your health care.

- When you shower or take a bath, use a plastic bag placed over your cast to help keep your cast dry. The plastic needs to be tightly secured above the cast. Ask your nurse for information about a product for this purpose.
- Do not rest your cast against hard surfaces for longer than 30 minutes because pressure can occur and your skin may breakdown.
- Raise your injured limb above the height of your heart as much as possible. This will help to reduce swelling and pain in the first few days.
- Do not scratch under the cast with any sharp object because this may cause skin irritation.
- Use baby powder, corn starch or talc, sprinkled under the cast to soothe the skin. Do not use these products if you have blisters or stitches on your skin under the cast.
- Use an oversized sock as a toe warmer or mitten.
- Exercise your fingers and toes. Exercise increases your circulation and helps reduce swelling and promotes healing.
- If you have any rough edges on your cast, use a nail file to file them away.
- Use a fan or hair dryer daily, set on cool, to keep your cast dry and comfortable, and to help relieve itching.

Warning signals to watch for:

- **Numbness or tingling, cold or blueness of fingers or toes**

If this occurs elevate your injured limb and call your doctor.

- **Extreme pain**

If extreme pain occurs, call your doctor right away.

- **Swelling of your injured limb that makes your cast feel too tight**

If swelling occurs, elevate that part to the level of your heart and apply an ice bag over the cast. If swelling does not decrease, call your doctor.

- **Loose fit that allows the cast to slide around**

If this occurs, call your doctor because a loose cast can cause skin irritation.

- **Breakage or damage to your cast**

If the cast becomes damaged, keep your injured part as immobile as possible and call your doctor right away.

What to expect when your cast is removed:

Your cast will be removed with the help of a specially designed saw. The tool has a vibrating blade that moves back and forth rather than spinning. The tool is attached to a vacuum cleaner that sucks up the cast dust. You will only feel some vibrating and pressure from the movement of the saw. After the cast is removed, expect your injured limb to appear smaller because of the inactivity of your muscles. Also, expect your skin to be dry and flaky. Use a skin lotion or bath oil to soften and remove dead skin.

Where to call with problems:

If you have problems with your cast, please call your doctor's office at _____, or OSU Medical Center's hospital operator at (614) 293-8000 and have the Orthopaedic Resident on call paged.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**