

Cast Care

Copyright © 2000-2016 by the American Academy of Family Physicians

Keyword(s): patient information;patient education;fractures;sprains;casts;cast care;broken boneandbones

description **Learn about how to care for your cast and when you might need to call your doctor.**

Cast Care

Why do I need a cast?

You have been given a cast to help your broken bone or torn ligaments heal. A cast can help keep the injured area from moving so you can heal faster without risk of repeated injury. The amount of time you'll need to wear your cast depends on the type of injury you have and how serious it is. Your doctor may want to check your cast 1 to 3 days after putting it on to be sure that the cast isn't too tight and that your injury is starting to heal.

Will the broken bone hurt?

Almost all broken bones cause pain. The cast should relieve some pain by limiting your movements. Your pain should become less severe each day. Call your doctor immediately if the pain in the casted area gets worse after the cast has been applied. New pain or numbness may mean that the cast is too tight. You should also call your doctor right away if you have new pain that develops in another area (for example, pain in your fingers or forearm if you have a wrist or thumb injury, or pain in your toes or calf if you have an ankle or foot injury).

To relieve discomfort that can occur when you get a cast, raise the cast above your heart by propping your arm or leg on pillows (especially in the first 48 hours after you first get the cast). You will have to lay down if the cast is on your leg. This may reduce pain and swelling. Flexing your fingers or wiggling the toes of the affected limb also helps reduced swelling and discomfort.

Is it okay to get the cast wet?

With some fiberglass casts, you can swim and bathe. However, most casts shouldn't get wet. If you get a cast wet, irritation and infection of the skin could develop. Talk to your doctor about how to care for your cast.

To avoid getting the cast wet during bathing, you can put a plastic bag over the cast and hold it in place with a rubber band. You can also buy a waterproof cast cover.

If the cast does get wet, you may be able to dry out the inside padding with a hair dryer. (Use a low heat setting and blow the air through the outside of the cast.)

What can I do about itching?

If your skin itches underneath the cast, don't slip anything sharp or pointed inside the cast to try and itch the spot. This could damage your skin and you could get an infection. Instead, try tapping the cast or blowing air from a hair dryer down into the cast.

What else should I know?

Try to keep the area around the edge of the cast clean and moisturized (but do not put lotion down inside the cast). Check the skin around the cast for irritation, chafing or sores.

Check with your doctor if a bad smell is coming from the inside of your cast (especially if you are running a fever). This may mean you have an infection.

Don't break off or file down any part of the cast. This could weaken the cast and make it more likely to crack or break. If there is an area of the cast that is uncomfortable, try padding it with a small towel or soft adhesive tape.