



Cast care: Do's and don'ts

A cast can't do its job without proper care. Find out the basics of cast care, from keeping a cast clean to knowing when to call the doctor.

If you or your child breaks a bone, a cast can help support and protect the injury as it heals. But a cast can't do its job without proper care. Find out more about the basics of cast care.

What are the different types of casts?

Casts are custom-made to fit and support injured limbs. There are two main types of casts:

- **Plaster casts.** Plaster casts are easier to mould for some uses than are fiberglass casts. Plaster casts are also generally less expensive.
- **Fiberglass casts.** These plastic casts are typically lighter and more durable than plaster casts. Also, X-rays penetrate fiberglass casts better than plaster casts — making it easier for your doctor to examine your child's bones while he or she is still wearing the cast.

What can be done to reduce swelling?

Swelling can cause your cast to feel tight and uncomfortable. To reduce swelling:

- **Elevate the affected area.** For the first 24 to 72 hours after the cast is applied, use pillows to raise the cast above the level of your child's heart. You will need to recline if the cast is on a leg.
- **Apply ice.** Loosely wrap an ice pack covered in a thin towel around your cast at the level of the injury. Wrapping the ice is important to keep the cast dry. Ice that's packed in a rigid container and touches the cast at only one point won't be as effective.
- **Keep moving.** Frequently move the fingers or toes of the injured limb help to reduce swelling.

What can I do if I wants to scratch under the cast?

A cast can cause the underlying skin to feel itchy. To relieve itchy skin, turn a hair dryer on a cool setting and aim it under the cast.

Don't allow stick objects, such as a coat hanger, inside the cast to scratch your skin. This could cause an injury or infection.

Is it OK to get a cast wet?

That depends on the type of cast you have. In general, casts are meant to stay DRY. A **wet cast** can lead to **skin irritation or infection**.

Plaster casts and fiberglass casts with conventional padding aren't waterproof. Keep your cast dry during baths or showers by covering it with two layers of plastic, sealed with a rubber band or duct tape. Avoid swimming while wearing a cast that isn't waterproof.

A **fiberglass cast that has a waterproof padding** can **get wet**. Only certain types of breaks can be treated with a waterproof cast and liner. Ask your doctor if it's safe for you to get your cast wet.

If the cast does get wet, you might be able to dry out the inside padding with a hair dryer. Use a low heat setting to avoid burning or irritating the skin.

How can I keep the cast in good shape?

Try these tips:

- **Keep it clean.** Keep dirt and sand away from the inside of your child's cast.
- **Skip toiletries.** Avoid placing powder, lotion or deodorant on or near the cast.
- **Leave adjustments to your doctor.** Don't pull the padding out of your cast. Don't trim the cast or break off rough edges without first asking your doctor.

What else do I need to know about my cast?

Contact your doctor immediately if you:

- Feels increasing pain and tightness in the injured limb
- Feels numbness or tingling in the injured hand or foot
- Feels burning or stinging under the cast
- Develops excessive swelling below the cast
- Can't move the toes or fingers of his or her injured limb, or they become blue or cold
- Says the cast feels too tight or too loose
- Develops red or raw skin around the cast
- Develops a crack, soft spots or a foul odour in the cast, or gets the cast soaking wet and doesn't dry it properly

Caring for a cast isn't always easy. Remind your child or yourself that taking care of the cast will help minimize discomfort during the healing process.