



# Spica Cast Care

A spica cast is used to keep your child's hips and legs from moving after an injury and/or surgery. This handout will help you learn how to care for your child's cast.

## Activities

Your child will be tired. At first, you may need to limit the number of visitors they have at one time. As your child gets stronger you can involve visitors in games. Exercise will help your child sleep better at night.

Ask your surgeon what limits your child will have to crawling, rolling, sitting, walking, or using a walker or crutches.

Before going home, make plans to get a reclining wheelchair with elevated leg rests. You may also need crutches, a portable bedside trapeze, and a bedpan. A beanbag chair may be something to consider.

When possible, take your child on outings. Try games and activities that involve arm movement.

## Bathing

Give your child a sponge bath every day. Wash skin at cast edges using a little soap, and dry well. Check the skin for sores. Use a flashlight to look inside the cast, especially at the tailbone. Incisions under the cast usually do not require care.

## Clothing

Clothes can be worn over your child's cast. Pants, shorts or overalls can be adapted by cutting along the seam and securing with Velco or snaps. Socks, large T-shirts or sweatshirts are also good options.

## Decorating cast

Feel free to decorate the cast with colored pens or decorative glue. Do not use oil or spray paints. They can get through the cast and cause serious skin problems. Limit the number of stickers or other decorations; there must be room for the cast to breathe.

## Keeping a spica cast clean and dry

Your child's cast will get dirty over time. If you find urine stains on the cast, try this:

1. Mix equal parts of white vinegar and water.
2. Soak a cloth in it and place it on the cast stains for one or two minutes.
3. Remove the cloth and let the cast air dry or use a hair dryer set on the cool setting.
4. If the cast smells, you can rub in a little baby powder on the cast while it is damp. Do not apply baby powder under the cast. Oil of clove also may be applied to the cast (**not** to the skin) to mask the odor.

**Any soiled area on the cast can be washed in the same manner as above, without the vinegar.**



### Diaper care

Disposable diapers are the easiest diapers to put into the cast, and are the most absorbent. When changing a diaper, tuck the front of the diaper into the front opening of the cast. Then turn your child over onto their stomach and tuck in the back. This makes for a nice, tight fit.

Change diapers at least every two hours. Check often in order to keep the cast from getting wet and soiled.

At night a cloth diaper or feminine napkin can be put inside the inside diaper to help absorb urine. Diaper liners may be helpful if your child wets (pees) a lot at a time.

### Going to the bathroom

A bedpan is very useful for older children. Provide a private place for your child to use it. Lining the bedpan with plastic wrap or covering it with a plastic bag before using it makes clean-up easier. There also are urinals for both male and female. These are available through a medical supplier or you may bring home the one provided while in the hospital.

Stool softeners help with the constipating effects of being inactive and taking pain medicine. Your child may be sent home with a prescription for a stool softener to be taken until their bowel movements have returned to normal. If a stool softener is not prescribed they can be found over the counter at any drugstore. If your child does not have a bowel movement in three days, call your doctor's office about a laxative.

We have found that sugar-free or diet Gummie Bears containing sorbitol can also help with constipation.

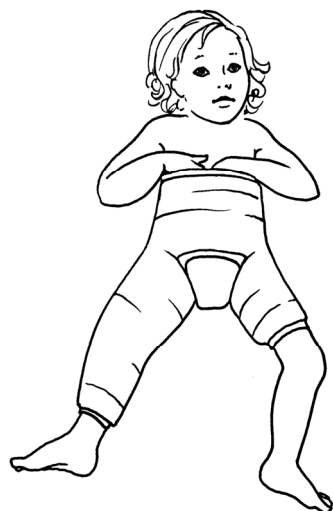


### Itching

Itching is usually caused by moisture on the skin or a healing wound. Benadryl can help reduce itching and is available over the counter without a prescription. You can also try using a hair dryer or vacuum cleaner hose on the *cool* setting to help circulate air.

Do not use any objects for scratching under the cast (coat hangers, knitting needles, etc.) Instead, use a game or activity to distract your child until the itching stops.

A fiberglass cast allows for air penetration over the areas that may itch or be wet.



### Meals

At first, your child may complain of a stomachache. This usually goes away after a few days. Try giving smaller meals more often. A good diet is the best way to prevent constipation. Constipation can be a side effect of pain medicines. Give your child lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals and breads, and plenty of fluids.

## **Moving, lifting**

Your child will need to change positions every 3 to 4 hours during the day. Before you go home, your nurse will show you how to turn and position your child. If you have a teen or child who is too heavy for you to move, you may want to rent a portable trapeze for over the bed.

**If the spica cast has a cross bar do not lift your child by it.**

## **Sleep**

Sleep is often difficult because the decreased activity and time in the hospital have changed your child's usual sleep patterns. Your child may find it easier to sleep on one side or the other, or on their front, using pillows for positioning.

Arrange for a signal, such as a bell or whistle, so that your child can call you at night. Older children may feel more secure with a phone nearby. When you must leave home, arrange for someone to stay with your child.

## **Transportation**

Transporting your child in a spica cast will take extra planning.

When possible, your child's cast will be formed to fit into their own car seat. Depending on how your child's legs and hips need to be positioned, a standard car seat may not work. A special car seat or harness may be needed. In some cases, even special restraints do not work and professional transportation, such as an ambulance, may be needed.

Your child should never ride with the vehicle seat reclined. The seat belt must be in contact with your child's body in order to properly protect them. Never transport your child in the back of a truck.

Airplane travel is possible but you may need to buy more than one seat. Ask about your options before you leave the hospital. The discharge coordinator can be very helpful with this.

## **How do I prepare my child for when the cast has to come off?**

Children tend to feel secure with their casts. Losing this security, along with the noisy sound of the cast saw and the look of the cast room, can be a bit scary. You may consider giving your child Tylenol (or their prescribed pain medicine) one hour before the cast removal.

You may spend time at home with your child, pretending to remove the cast with a vacuum that has a hose attachment. Refer to the cast saw not as a saw, but a vacuum.

After several weeks in a cast, your child's joints may become stiff and hard to move. This will slowly improve. Warm baths will decrease the discomfort and help your child regain range of motion. Normal play will reduce stiffness and help them gain strength. Physical Therapy is rarely needed. The first week or two out of the cast can be a tough time for the child and family.

### To Learn More

- Orthopedics  
206-987-2109
- Ask your child's  
healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask  
your child's nurse.
- From outside the  
hospital, call the  
toll-free Family  
Interpreting Line  
1-866-583-1527.  
Tell the interpreter  
the name or extension  
you need.
- For Deaf and hard of  
hearing callers  
206-987-2280 (TTY)

Depending upon the type of surgery and the diagnosis, and length of time in the spica cast, it may take some time to adjust. It usually takes as long as your child has been in the cast to get their strength and flexibility back.

### When should I call the doctor?

Please call the doctor if your child has:

- Numbness or tingling in toes
- Swelling of the toes
- Toes that are cold or blue/purple
- A broken or cracked cast
- Unusual complaints of pain
- Fever while recovering from surgery
- Difficulty breathing

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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