

Cast Care - Arm

Definition

- A cast is a hard shell that completely covers a bone fracture. Also called a full cast.
- It keeps broken bones from moving until they heal. That also reduces pain.
- It also protects the injured part from any more injury.

Health Information

Types of Casts

- The cast is made out of plaster or fiberglass. Fiberglass casts are lighter and stronger. Fiberglass casts are strong within 1 hour. Some fiberglass casts are waterproof.
- Plaster casts are heavier. It takes plaster casts 48 hours to become dry and strong.
- The inner layer of a cast is cotton padding to protect the skin.
- Fractures are not casted until the swelling goes down. Most often that is 4 to 7 days after the injury occurs. Until then the patient is kept in a splint.
- Casts for fractures can be removed after 4 to 6 weeks in children (longer in adults).

Tight Casts

- A tight cast can reduce blood flow to the fingers. It can also pinch a nerve.
- Main symptoms of a tight cast are numbness, tingling or increased pain. Other symptoms are color changes (bluish or pale) or swelling of the fingers.
- Any symptoms that don't go away with elevation need to be seen right away. Reason: to prevent any serious damage to muscles or nerves.
- The cast may need to be removed and replaced with one less tight.

Care Advice

1. Fracture Symptoms - Overview:

- Fractures are quite painful. The pain is worst the first 3-4 days after the injury.
- It slowly improves over the first 2 weeks. By then the bones have joined together.
- The most helpful way to reduce pain is elevation and pain medicines.
- A fracture takes 4-6 weeks to heal all the way.

2. Pain Medicine:

- To help with fracture pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen.
- Ibuprofen works well for this type of pain.
- Give pain meds for at least the first 48 hours. Then use as needed.

3. Elevate the Injured Part:

- Elevate often during the first 3 days after putting on the cast. Then use it for any numbness, tingling or pain of the fingers.
- Reason: reduce the amount of swelling that occurs with fractures.
- Raise the arm above the level of the heart. Rest it on pillows.
- Also wiggle the fingers to improve blood flow.

4. **Numbness and Tingling from a Tight Cast:**
 - Watch for symptoms of a cast that is too tight.
 - Numbness, tingling and pain of the fingers may occur. Other symptoms are swelling or a color change of the fingers.
 - It's from swelling that causes the cast to get tight.
 - It should go away with elevation. Wiggling the fingers also helps.
 - If it does not go away within 1 hour, your child needs a cast check right away.
5. **Itching Under the Cast:**
 - Use a hair dryer to blow some cool air into the cast.
 - Don't stick anything down into the cast to itch the area. Reason: It might injure the skin and cause an infection. It could also get stuck inside the cast.
6. **Rough Edge on a Cast:**
 - If an edge of the cast is rough, it can cause pain or redness.
 - You can file it down with an emery board (nail file).
 - You can also cover the edge with duct tape.
 - To remove a cast, the office must have a cast cutter.
7. **Keep the Cast Dry:**
 - Don't get the cast wet.
 - Wet cotton padding under a cast can cause skin rashes or itching.
 - Wet plaster can become soft, crumble or crack.
 - The outside of fiberglass casts are waterproof.
 - If it becomes wet, blow-dry the cotton lining or plaster cast with a hair dryer. Use a low setting. Caution: Hot air can cause burns.
8. **Bathing with a Cast:**
 - To avoid getting the cast wet, enclose it in a plastic bag for bathing.
 - Close the upper part of the plastic with tape or an elastic strap.
 - You can also buy a waterproof sleeve at some drugstores.
 - Use a bathtub. Reason: it's harder to keep a cast dry in a shower.
 - Younger children may need to be given a sponge bath with a washcloth and basin of water.
 - Don't dunk the cast in bath water even though it's covered.
 - Cover the cast in plastic when it's raining.
9. **Activities Allowed with a Cast:**
 - Children with casts can go to school and play with friends.
 - Light exercise is fine after the first week.
 - Do not ride a bike, climb anything or play any contact sports.
 - Reason: you might fall and re-break the healing bones.
 - Avoid swimming.
10. **Cast Removal Date:**
 - Most casts are removed at about 4 to 6 weeks.
 - Keeping them on longer is not harmful.
 - If you do not have a removal date, call the office for one.

Call Your Doctor If

- Fingers develop pain, numbness or tingling that does not go away after 1 hour of elevation
- Fingers become pale or bluish
- Can't wiggle fingers
- Cast cracks or become soft
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child become worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

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