

Splint Care - Arm

Definition

- A splint is a padded piece of fiberglass or plaster
- Also called a half cast
- It's placed on only one side of an injured arm
- The splint is held in place by an elastic wrap (bandage)

Health Information

Splint Purpose

- Protect a fracture or torn ligament until the swelling has gone down. Most often that is 4 to 7 days after the injury occurs. Then a full cast can be put on if needed.
- Splints also reduce pain because movement increases pain.

Tight Splints

- A tight splint can reduce blood flow to the fingers. It can also pinch a nerve.
- Main symptoms of a tight splint are numbness, tingling or increased pain. Other symptoms are color changes (bluish or pale) or swelling of the fingers.
- A tight elastic wrap (bandage) that holds the splint in place is the main cause. The symptoms will go away if the wrap is taken off and then applied less tightly.

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 Splint:**
 - Watch for symptoms of a splint that is too tight.
 - Numbness, tingling and pain of the fingers may occur. Other symptoms are swelling or a color change of the fingers. This means the elastic bandage is too tight.
 - Remove the elastic wrap.
 - Do NOT take off the hard splint. Hold it in place with your hand.
 - Wait for the symptoms to go away. That may take up to 30 minutes.
 - Re-wrap it less tightly this time.
5. **Rough Edge on a Splint:**
 - If an edge of the splint 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.
6. **Keep the Splint Dry:**
 - Don't get the splint wet.
 - Wet cotton padding under a splint can cause skin rashes or itching.
 - Wet plaster can become soft, crumble or crack.
 - If it becomes wet, blow-dry the splint with a hair dryer. Use a low setting. Caution: Hot air can cause burns.
7. **Bathing with a Splint:**
 - To avoid getting the splint 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 splint 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 splint in bath water even though it's covered.
 - Cover the splint in plastic when it's raining.
8. **Activities Allowed with a Splint:**
 - Children with splints 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.

Call Your Doctor If

- Finger pain, numbness or tingling doesn't go away in 1 hour after loosening elastic wrap
- Fingers become pale or bluish and doesn't go away with loosening
- Splint cracks or become soft
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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