

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CASTS

HOW IS A CAST PUT ON?

First, several layers of soft cotton are wrapped around the injured area. Next the fiberglass outer layer is soaked in water. Then the fiberglass is wrapped around the soft first layer. The outer layer is wet but will dry to a hard, protective covering. Sometimes tiny cuts are made in the sides of the cast to allow room for swelling, this is called bi-valving.

HOW ARE CASTS TAKEN OFF?

A small electrical saw is used to remove the cast. Although it may look and sound scary to you, the process is actually quick and painless. The saw's blade isn't sharp – it has a dull, round blade that vibrates up and down. The vibration is strong enough to break apart the fiberglass or plaster but shouldn't hurt your skin and may even tickle.

IS IT OK TO HAVE PEOPLE SIGN MY CAST?

Definitely! That often makes the whole broken bone experience more bearable for kids. Permanent markers usually work best; washable ones can smear. Feel free to encourage siblings, family members, and classmates to sign it, draw pictures on it, or decorate it with stickers. Your child may even be able to keep it as a souvenir.

WHAT IF I HAVE AN ITCH UNDER MY CAST?

Try blowing some air in the cast with a hair dryer – be sure to use the cool setting, though. And you should **never** pour baby powder or oils in the cast to try and relieve your itch, or try to reach the itch with long, pointed objects such as a pencil or hanger – these could scratch or irritate your skin and can lead to infection.

WHAT IF THE CAST IS CAUSING MY FINGERS OR TOES TO TURN WHITE, PURPLE, OR BLUE, OR IF THE SKIN AROUND THE EDGES OF THE CAST GETS RED OR RAW?

The cast may be too tight. Redness and rawness are typically signs that the cast is wet inside, for sweat or water. Sometimes, patients pick and remove the padding from the edges of fiberglass casts. They shouldn't do this, because the fiberglass edges can rub on the skin and cause irritation. Make sure to call us so we can fix the problem right away.

WHY AREN'T SOME TYPES OF BROKEN BONES PUT IN CASTS RIGHT AWAY?

Some kinds of fractures don't need casts to heal. Certain fractures of larger long bones, such as the femur (thighbone), are hard to keep straight in a cast. Although doctors used to commonly put many of these kinds of fractures in traction (a gentle way of pulling the bone straight), these days, surgery is often used instead.

DO ALL BROKEN BONES NEED CASTS?

It's not practical to cast ribs and collarbones (clavicles). Even displaced collarbones (in which pieces on either side of the break are out of line) heal well with a sling or special strap called a "figure-of-eight clavicle strap," which is worn like a vest. Some non-

displaced finger and toe fractures (in which the pieces on either side of the break line up) that don't involve the joint or the growing part of the child's bone (called the growth plate) may heal with a splint or buddy taping (taping the adjacent unaffected finger or toe.)

WHAT WILL THE INJURED AREA LOOK AND FEEL LIKE WHEN THE CAST IS REMOVED?

Once the cast is off, the injured area will probably look and feel pretty weird to you: The skin will be pale, dry, or flaky; hair will look darker; and the area (muscles especially) will look smaller or weaker. Make sure not to peel the dry skin away, let it sluff off on its own. You can purchase carmol 20 lotion over the counter from the pharmacy and it will help with the dryness and also moisturizes your skin. Don't worry, though – this is all temporary. You may also experience stiffness in the joint of the healing area. Your doctor can recommend specific range of motion exercises to assist you in your recovery. And depending on the type and location of your fracture, the doctor may also give you special exercises to get the muscle around the broken bone back in working order.

WILL I FEEL PAIN WHEN THE BROKEN BONE IS IN A CAST?

Some pain is expected for the first few days, but it's usually not severe. Your pain should steadily decrease over time. If the pain increases over time it could be a sign that you are using the extremity too much. You should try elevating the limb and limiting your activity. If this still doesn't help you need to contact your doctor and inform him of the situation.

WHY DOES THE SKIN TURN “PRUNY” AFTER BEING SOAKED FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

Normally, skin is water-resistant because of a “protective barrier of keratin,” a protein made by the epidermis to keep moisture, bacteria, and other unwanted stuff out. But if skin is immersed in water for a long time, moisture gets through and “the cells in the epidermal layer...absorb water and swell. The enlarged cells cause the skin to pucker and wrinkle.”

Luckily, they don't stay that way. “Several minutes after toweling off, the water in the skin cells evaporates, and the cells return to their normal shape and size. Otherwise, we would all be walking around looking like raisins.”