



Cast Care

You have been given a cast to allow your broken bone or torn ligaments to heal. A cast can keep the injured area still so that your body can heal itself faster without risk of repeated injury. How long you'll need to wear your cast depends on the type of injury you have and how serious it is.

Many casts today are made of fiberglass. It has one major drawback—you can't write on it! On the positive side, it is lighter weight and less bulky. It takes longer to dry when first applied and it has a rougher surface than traditional casts. You may snag your clothing or furniture, but you can remedy this by using a fingernail file to gently smooth down rough spots on your cast or by wrapping your cast with stockinette.

THE FIRST FEW DAYS

It will take some time to get used to your new cast. You will learn to adjust your balance to the extra weight. Move carefully and deliberately until you are comfortable with it. **BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF!** Allow extra time to get dressed in the morning and to get to class.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS

1. FOLLOW YOUR PHYSICIAN'S INSTRUCTIONS!
2. Keep your splint or cast dry. Moisture weakens plaster and damp padding next to the skin can cause irritation.
3. Move your fingers and toes frequently to prevent swelling and joint stiffness.
4. Elevate your limb to help reduce pain and swelling.
5. Avoid bumping or knocking your cast against hard surfaces.
6. DO NOT use anything to scratch under your cast. Do not slide anything down inside your cast or apply powders or deodorants to itching skin. There is always a chance that you could break the skin and cause an infection. If you have an itching problem, contact your doctor. You might try tapping or 'slapping' the cast, or scratching the same spot on the opposite arm or leg. Strange as it sounds, some people say it helps.
7. NEVER put padding in your cast, such as cotton or tissues. It may fall down into the cast or decrease your circulation.
8. Place a pad under your cast when resting it on furniture, to avoid scratching or damaging the furniture.

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9. NEVER cut or trim your cast yourself. Only your physician should alter it.
10. Elevate your limb the first few days, whenever possible, to prevent or reduce swelling.
11. If you have a leg cast, it may take your shoulders and arms a few days to get use to using crutches. Take it easy; don't overdue it.
12. If you have an arm cast, you may be given a sling to use for the first few days. Avoid allowing your hand to dangle downwards as this can cause swelling.
13. To avoid getting your cast wet when taking a shower, cover it with a plastic bag and secure the bag with waterproof tape, making sure that it does not allow water to leak in. If possible, use a hand-held showerhead and try to direct the water away from the cast. Commercial cast covers are available at the Health Center. If your cast gets wet, you may be able to dry out the inside padding with a blow dryer, **but call your doctor or the Health Center first**. If allowed, use a low setting and blow the air through the outside of the cast. Avoid burning yourself. Make sure that the cast padding is totally dry.

PAIN CONTROL

Almost all broken bones and torn ligaments cause pain. The cast should relieve some pain by limiting your movements. Usually your pain will be less severe each day. If you were given pain medication to use, follow the directions on the package. Do not take any more of the medication nor take it any more frequently, than the directions indicate. Most pain medications cause some drowsiness and there is always the danger that you could become dizzy and fall and injure yourself. Many pain relievers are irritating to the stomach. You should always take your medication with food and a full glass of water. Contact UHC if your pain is not controlled by your medication.

If you have any problems or questions contact the University Health Center at (574)631-7497.

CALL the University Health Center at (574)631-7497 IMMEDIATELY if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- **persistent pain**
- **your cast feels too tight**
- **your cast becomes loose, broken or cracked**
- **you have painful rubbing under your cast**
- **you experience coldness, or you notice a whitish or bluish discoloration of your fingers or toes**
- **loss of active movement of toes or fingers**
- **pain, numbness, or a tingling sensation in your fingers or toes**
- **excessive swelling below the cast**
- **any drainage or unusual odor from your cast**

REFERENCES

“How to Care for Your Cast”, American Academy of Family Physicians/AAFP Patient Information handout 2000-2008
Care of Casts and Splints, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons/AAOS—2007