

DUKE ORTHOPAEDICS OF RALEIGH

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Cast Care

What is a cast?

A cast is a supportive structure that surrounds an injured body part to protect it, keep it from moving, and allow it to heal. Casts are made of fiberglass or plaster. They are most often used for broken bones. They are also used sometimes for torn ligaments or tendons and may be used after surgery.

How is a cast put on?

Your health care provider will first place padding around your injured body part. Casting material is rolled like a bandage over the padding. The casting material then hardens. While the casting material hardens, it will get warm.

How is a cast removed?

Your health care provider will remove the cast with a special cast saw. The special saw is designed so that it will not cut your skin. The cast should be removed only by your provider.

How long will I need to wear my cast?

How long you wear your cast depends on your injury. Some injuries heal within a few weeks and some take several months.

Can I get my cast wet?

Most casts should not get wet. A plaster cast will fall apart if it gets wet. A fiberglass cast won't fall apart but the padding underneath may start to smell if it gets wet. Wet padding may also hurt your skin.

When you shower or bathe, put your cast in a heavy plastic bag. Hold the bag in place with a rubber band. Even then, try not to get the bag wet. If your cast does get wet, you can dry it with a hair dryer.

Your doctor may give you a special cast and liner that allows you to get the cast wet and even swim.

After my cast is put on what problems should I watch for?

Your injury may continue to swell. To limit swelling, elevate the injured area at a level above your heart. Signs of problem swelling include:

- You have severe or persistent pain.
- Your fingers or toes feel numb or painful or can't move.
- The color of your fingernails or toenails changes.

Sometimes the body part inside a cast becomes infected. Signs of infection include:

- drainage from the skin under the cast
- pain
- fever.

After a while the cast may not fit well. It may feel too loose or too tight. It may weaken due to wear and tear.

Contact your health care provider immediately if you have any of these problems.

What can I do about itching?

Many people have itching inside a cast. Never reach inside a cast with your fingernails or another object to scratch. It may injure your skin and cause an infection. Sometimes shaking a small amount of talcum powder inside a cast or using a hair dryer on a cool setting helps relieve the itching.

How active can I be when I have my cast?

How active you can be depends on your injury. Be sure to ask your health care provider about this.

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