

A GUIDE TO SPICA CAST CARE

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THE CAST AND IT'S CARE

Applying a Spica Cast

A spica cast is designed to hold bones and joints still to allow for proper healing. This cast will cover the lower portion of your child's chest, abdomen, and one or both legs. These casts are usually made of fiberglass bandages, which are stronger and lighter than plaster casts.

Once the doctor places the bone or lower extremity in a position, the legs, hips and trunk area are wrapped in a cotton liner or "stocking". Wet fiberglass bandages are layered over this cotton lining. When the bandages dry, the solid fiberglass cast is formed.

A bar may be placed between the legs. This supports the cast and keeps it from breaking. Never use this bar to lift or move your child around. It could break and damage the cast and/or the position of the bones.

It usually takes 3 to 4 hours for a spica cast to dry completely. As the cast dries, it is important to leave the cast exposed to air. During this time the cast should not be covered with anything. However, you can use a pillow to prop up the leg and make it more comfortable. Once the cast has dried completely, it will weigh less. The edges may be rough. To protect your child's skin from these rough edges, a soft tape called moleskin may be used.

Smoothing out the Rough Edges

Once the cast is dry, moleskin bandages can be applied all around the rough edges of the cast. This is often done in the hospital soon after the cast is applied. However, you may need to change these bandages when they get old, dirty or loose. You will probably take some extra moleskin home with you. But if you need additional moleskin, it can be purchased at any medical supply store.

Applying the moleskin is simple. Just follow these steps:

- Cut moleskin into 3-inch strips with rounded edges like bandages.
- Remove the backing from the moleskin strip.
- Place the sticky side of the moleskin strip against the cotton lining inside the cast.
- Fold the moleskin over the rough edge and smooth the rest of the sticky surface onto the cast's outer surface.
- Overlap the edges of each moleskin strip for better coverage.
- Cover all edges completely.

Cast Care and Cleaning

It's generally easy to take care of a spica cast. Naturally, you don't want to put pressure on the cast, or drop anything on it. If the cast ever does become damaged or broken, keep the area as still as possible and call your doctor.

The soft cotton lining is very important because it protects the skin. Never remove pieces of the lining. It's also important to keep both the cast and the lining dry. If the cast or lining gets wet, use a hair dryer on the cool setting to help dry it. This may take as long as an hour.

You may clean the outside of the cast using a pre-moistened wipe or a slightly damp cloth and soap. Make sure the cloth is only damp, not wet, and that you do not get the lining wet.

Check for Good Circulation

When a spica cast is required following an injury or surgery, observing your child's legs for proper blood flow (circulation) is important. Frequent checking (at least four times per day) is most important during the first week after leaving the hospital. It is a good idea to continue checking at least every morning and evening as long as your child is in the spica cast.

Signs of poor circulation include:

- **Progressive swelling** – If the cast feels tight or you cannot comfortably fit your finger between the cast and the skin, that's a sign of swelling. To reduce swelling, prop up your child's legs and hips with pillows.
- **A persistent blue or gray color in the toenail** – Press on your child's toenail for a moment. It will turn white. When you release the toenail, the pink color should quickly return (within three seconds).
- **Unusual pain or sensations** – The skin near or under the cast becomes painful, tingles or is numb.
- **Poor movement** – Your child has difficulty moving his or her toes.

If you notice any problems with circulation, call your doctor or clinic right away.

GETTING AROUND

Spica Kids are Going Places

Just because a child has a spica cast does not mean that he or she cannot move around or leave the home. Before leaving the hospital, your doctor, nurse, or social worker will recommend appropriate equipment for your child. They can also help you choose and show you how to use this equipment. The following are great ways to help your child get around. However, you do need to keep a close watch on your child.

- **A Reclining Wheelchair** – If your child can be propped up, a reclining wheelchair is highly recommended. School-aged children can also use the wheelchair to attend classes. Do make sure you change your child's position in the chair every couple of hours. Changing position is important to help decrease the chance of skin problems.
- **Strollers** – Many children with a spica cast can still be seated in a stroller. You may be able to adapt a stroller you already have. Certain kinds of strollers already have sides low enough to accommodate the cast.
- **A Wagon** – This childhood favorite is also a great way to pull around a child in a spica cast. You can use pillows or rolled-up towels around the sides of the wagon to cushion the ride.
- **Skateboard or Dolly Device** – Children who are old enough to crawl often enjoy a device with wheels and a flat platform like a skateboard or mechanic's dolly. Children can lay on their stomachs and use their hands to push themselves around. As with all these devices, it's important to watch your child as he or she rolls around.

Traveling Safety in Cars

Traveling in a car with a child in a spica cast requires special care. There are two kinds of child restraining devices that are able to be used with spica casts, the SPELCAST car seat or the E-Z On Vest. The one that's right for you depends on your child's size and weight and your personal preference.

Your doctor, nurse or social worker will help you choose the correct device for your child. Our Protective Services Department has a car seat loaner program that can help you by loaning you the correct car seat or seat belt for your child before you leave the hospital.

Whichever device you use, make sure you read all the directions on how to install it so that your child can travel safely. For extra security, we suggest you place a foam pad between the restraining device and the back of the front seat.

DAILY ROUTINES

What to Wear?

Children with a spica cast will not be able to wear some of their usual clothing. Many families find that oversized shirts or dresses work well. You can also cut clothes like shorts along the seams. Then you can use safety pins to hold the clothing together. Some people prefer to sew Velcro strips to each side and simply connect the Velcro to hold the clothing closed.

Eating Right

It's unusual for a child's appetite to change after a spica cast is applied. Without activity, some children want to eat more, just from boredom. This is not a healthy idea. Simply holding or hugging your child or getting your child involved in an activity will help fill that emotional need.

Other children lose their appetites and don't want to eat as much. In this case you might want to use a nutritional supplement such as an instant breakfast drink to make sure your child receives his or her recommended daily vitamins and minerals. Extra vitamins and minerals, including calcium, are not necessary. If your child starts losing weight or you become concerned about a poor appetite, please notify your doctor. Your child may also become constipated as a result of changes in appetite and lack of activity. Providing lots of fluids and food high in fiber, such as fruits and vegetables, may help prevent this.

A bib, T-shirt or towel, large enough to cover the top of the cast may help prevent crumbs of food from falling into the cast while your child is eating.

How Should You Handle Toileting?

Proper toileting is very important in the care of a child with a spica cast. Good hygiene and cleanliness will help minimize rashes and odors. Since casts will seldom be changed because of toileting accidents, good care is essential.

If your child is potty trained:

- Boys can use urinals. Prop up his head and shoulders so the urine runs downstream and into the urinal.
- Girls can be propped on the toilet or use a bed pan. If a bed pan is used, make a wick out of several sheets of toilet paper. Place this wick so that it will direct the flow of urine into the bed pan. If you prefer, cover the bed pan with a diaper instead.

If your child is in diapers, you must change the diaper frequently so urine does not leak into the cast. We recommend that you check for wetness every hour. In addition, change your child's diaper at least once during the night. Change your child's sleeping position at this time as well.

A method of "two-step" diapering is recommended:

- **Step 1** – Use a small diaper, a preemie diaper, a sanitary napkin, or a bladder control pad next to the skin. Tuck the front and back edges of this diaper or pad inside the cotton lining of the cast.
- **Step 2** – Use a larger diaper over the smaller diaper or pad. Tuck this larger diaper under the lining of the cast between the legs. Wrap the outer diaper around the cast and hold it in place with the tape.

Good Skin Care

During the time your child has a spica cast, you will need to give him or her sponge baths. During the bath, you need to check your child's skin for any breakdown, redness or irritation.

Again, when bathing, you want to clean the skin without getting the lining wet. Use soap and a damp cloth to wash the skin around the cast. Then dry the skin thoroughly with a towel. If the cotton lining does get wet, use a hair dryer set on cool to dry it.

Never use oils, lotions or powders on the skin around or under the cast. They can seep into the cotton lining of the cast and cause further skin irritation. Do not pull out sections of the lining either, since the lining protects the skin. If the skin around the cast does become red and irritated, call your doctor's office or clinic for recommendations.

If It Itches...

Don't scratch! Never stick anything into the cast to scratch an area. This can damage the skin which could then become infected. Instead, use one of the following ways to relieve itching:

- Change your child's position. Moving your child may allow more blood flow to the affected area. As circulation returns, the itching may go away.
- Use your hand to gently pat the cast over the area that itches.
- Set a hair dryer on cool. Blow cool air into the cast.
- Fill an ice bag with ice. Cover the bag with a towel and hold the covered ice bag on the cast over the irritated area. The coolness will help relieve itching. The towel will keep the cast from getting wet.
- Provide activities to redirect your child's attention.

STAYING ACTIVE

Move Around

Obviously it's difficult for a child with a spica cast to move around a lot. Still, it's important to change positions often. This will help prevent skin breakdown or bed sores.

There are several ways to prevent these problems:

- Change your child's position at least every two hours. Remember, do not use the bar between your child's legs to move him or her.
- Change your child's position at least once during the night. Make sure you reposition him or her before you go to sleep. Then set an alarm to get up at least once during the night and reposition your child again.
- If your child sleeps in a crib, always keep the sides of the crib in the raised position.
- When your child is lying on his or her back, use pillows to prop up the head, neck and shoulders. Place a rolled-up towel or pillow under the legs so that the feet and heels can dangle without touching the bed.
- When your child is lying on his or her stomach, use pillows under the chest and head. Let the feet dangle off the end of the bed.

Play Around!

It's important to continue as normal a home life as possible. In fact, all children should get as much physical and mental activity as possible. We encourage school-aged children to return to the classroom. Federal law requires provisions be made for them or that home schooling be provided. Talk with your school to determine which option is best for your family.

Preschoolers will need toys that are too large to fall into the cast. Games, TV, music, books and art projects are other ways to help children stay alert and active.

CALL YOUR DOCTOR WHEN:

- The cast is broken or damaged.
- The cast gets very wet or soggy.
- The cast and padding is unable to be dried by the hair dryer.
- The cast is too tight.
- There is extreme swelling in the toes or around the cast.
- Your child cannot move his or her toes.
- The skin in or around the cast is numb or tingles.
- The skin has become red or irritated.
- There is a change in skin color.

- Your child has unusual pain that does not go away after medication or a change of position.
- The cast is stained with new blood or other drainage.
- There is a foul smell coming from the cast.
- Your child runs a fever over 101 degrees for more than 24 hours and the fever is not associated with any other illness.
- Anytime you have a question about your child's care.