

Cast Care

A cast supports and protects injured bones, ligaments, or other tissues, keeping them in place while they heal. Casts may be made of fiberglass or plaster.

“After the health care provider places the cast, it’ll take 15 to 20 minutes for a fiberglass cast to harden, or a couple of days for a plaster cast.”

To keep swelling down in the first few days after you get the cast, raise your injured arm or leg above your heart; apply ice, using a sealed plastic bag or ice pack wrapped around the cast near the injured area; and wiggle your uninjured fingers or toes often. It’s important to keep your cast dry the entire time you have it on. Before showering and other contact with water, cover the cast with plastic wrap, secure both ends with waterproof tape. As an added precaution, you can also cover the cast with a plastic bag and tape the opening. Sometimes a cast may have a waterproof liner, which allows you to shower—and even swim—without covering the cast.

The skin under your cast may itch. If it does, resist the urge to scratch.

“Trying to scratch underneath the cast with a sharp object could cause a break in the skin that could become infected. Speak to your health care provider about relieving the itch safely.”

Call your health care provider if you have any cracks, dents, or holes in your cast; a fever; swelling that makes the cast feel tight; sores around the edges; or something stuck inside. Get immediate medical attention if your fingers or toes turn blue or numb; you have bleeding, pus, or drainage; a foul smell comes from your cast; you’re in severe pain; or your cast breaks.

“Taking proper care of a cast requires some effort, and it’s important to the healing process. But the good news is your healthcare provider will remove it, so it’s only temporary.”

And once the cast is off, be sure to follow your health care provider’s instructions as you continue to heal.