

GETTING USED TO A SPLINT OR CAST

Swelling due to your injury may cause pressure in your splint or cast for the first 48 – 72 hours. This may cause your injured arm or leg to feel snug or tight in the splint or cast. If you have a splint, your health care provider will show you how to adjust it to accommodate the swelling.

It is very important to keep the swelling down. This will lessen pain and help your injury heal.

To reduce swelling:

- **Elevate.** It is very important to elevate your injured arm or leg for the first 24 to 72 hours. Prop your injured arm or leg up above your heart by putting it on pillows or some other support. You will have to recline if the splint or cast is on your leg. Elevation allows clear fluid and blood to drain “downhill” to your heart.
- **Exercise:** Move your uninjured but swollen fingers or toes gently and often. Moving them will prevent stiffness.
- **Ice:** Apply ice to the splint or cast. Place the ice in a dry plastic bag or ice pack and loosely wrap it around the splint or cast at the level of the injury. Ice that is packed in a rigid container and touches the cast at only one point will not be effective. Apply ice to the splint or cast AND elevate your arm or leg to reduce swelling.

Warning Signs:

Swelling can create a lot of pressure under your cast. This can lead to problems. If you experience any of the following symptoms, contact your health care provider’s office immediately for advice.

- **Increased Pain and the feeling that the splint or cast is too tight.** This may be caused by swelling.
- **Numbness and tingling in your hand or foot.** This may be caused by too much pressure on the nerves.
- **Burning and Stinging.** This may be caused by too much pressure on the skin.
- **Excessive swelling below the cast.** This may mean the cast is slowing your blood circulation.
- **Loss of active movement of toes or fingers.** This requires an urgent evaluation by your health care provider.

Taking Care of your Splint or Cast:

Your health care provider will explain any restrictions on using your injured arm or leg while it is healing. You must follow your health care provider’s instructions carefully to make sure your bone heals properly. The following information provides general guidelines only, and is not a substitute for your health care provider’s advice. After you have adjusted to your splint or cast for a few days, it is important to keep it in good condition. This will help your recovery.

- **Keep your splint or cast dry.** Moisture weakens plaster and damp padding next to the skin can cause irritation. Use two layers of plastic or purchase waterproof shields to keep your splint or cast dry while you shower or bathe.
- **Walking Casts.** Do not walk on a “walking cast” until it is completely dry and hard. It takes about one hour for fiberglass, and two to three days for plaster to become hard enough to walk on.
- **Avoid Dirt.** Keep dirt, sand and powder away from the inside of your splint or cast.
- **Padding.** Do not pull out the padding from your splint or cast.
- **Itching.** Do not stick objects such as coat hangers inside the splint or cast to scratch itching skin. Do not apply powders or deodorants to itching skin. If itching persists, contact your health care provider.
- **Trimming.** Do not break off rough edges of the cast or trim the cast before asking your health care provider.
- **Skin.** Inspect the skin around the cast. If your skin becomes red or raw around the cast, contact your health care provider.
- **Inspect the cast regularly.** If it becomes cracked or develops soft spots, contact your health care provider’s office at Webster Orthopedics: **1-800-943-8099.**