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## What is a spica cast?

A spica cast is a type of hard splint made of plaster or fiberglass. It surrounds an injured or repaired body part to help:

- Prevent movement.
- Protect it.
- Keep it in the correct position until it heals.

Talk with the doctor about specific care for your child's cast. Some guidelines for cast care are listed in this teaching sheet.

## How can I keep the cast clean and dry?

- As soon as the cast dries (about 45 minutes for fiberglass and 24 hours for plaster), your child's nurse will show you how to "petal" or reinforce the cast edges to keep them clean, dry and smooth.
- Keep the rough edges of the cast covered with moleskin. Waterproof tape is used to cover the moleskin in the diaper area to prevent soiling.
- Cover the cast with a towel, or use a bib when your child is eating. This helps prevent food and drink from spilling on or into the cast.
- If the cast gets dirty, clean it with a slightly damp cloth with soap. Baby wipes also work well. Be sure to wipe off any moisture. Let the cast air-dry, or use a hair dryer set on **cool** setting.

## How will I know the cast is not too tight?

Make sure your child's cast is not too tight. Blood needs to flow well to all body parts around the cast. Every 8 hours or more often if needed, be sure to check:

- Movement of toes and fingers. Have your child move or wiggle their fingers and toes often.
- Sensation (feeling). Touch the area above and below the cast several times each day. Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child complains of numbness, tingling or pain.
- Blood flow (circulation). Press briefly on each of your child's large toenails several times each day. When it turns white, let go. Call your child's doctor **right away** if the pink color does not return within 3 seconds.
- Temperature. If either of your child's feet is cold, cover it with a blanket or sock, or raise it above the level of the heart. Check again in 20 minutes. If it is still cold, check feeling and blood flow. Call your child's doctor **right away** if you think there may be a problem.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

## Hip spica cast, continued

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- Severe (very bad) swelling. Look for swelling above and below the cast several times each day. A little swelling is normal, but a lot of swelling is not. If there is swelling, raise it above the level of the heart for 1 hour. Watch it closely. Call your child's doctor if the swelling does not go down.
- Pain that is not controlled. Call your child's doctor **right away** if the medicine ordered does not help your child's pain.



Checking blood flow

### How should I bathe my child?

- Keep your child's cast dry at all times.
- Give your child a sponge bath each day.
  - Wash the skin that is not covered by the cast with soap and water.
  - Protect the cast with towels or plastic trash bags to keep it from getting wet.
- Do not use lotions, oils or powders around the edges or under the cast. They soften the skin, and this could cause irritation or skin breakdown, which can lead to infection. Powder may cake up and do the same thing.
- Check your child's skin at least 4 times a day for redness and irritation.

### How should I feed my child?

- Raise your child's head up higher than their hips. Use pillows to raise their head and chest as needed. You can also place your child on their stomach with their head and chest raised.
- Cover the cast with a large t-shirt or towel during meals.
- Make sure to cut their food into small pieces to help prevent choking.
- The first few weeks after surgery may not be the right time to add new foods to your child's diet. This can help avoid vomiting (throwing up) and diarrhea (loose stools).

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# Hip spica cast, continued

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## What should I do about diapering and toileting?

If your child wears diapers:

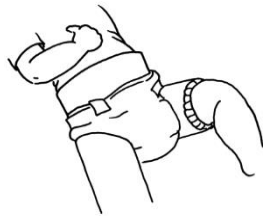
- Tuck a smaller size disposable diaper than usually used between your child’s skin and the cast. The plastic backing should be next to the cast’s inside surface. The cotton side should be next to your child’s skin.
- You can place a sanitary napkin or pad inside the small diaper to absorb even more.
- Put a larger diaper on top to keep it in place.
- Check diapers often, and change as soon as soiled.

If your child does not wear diapers:

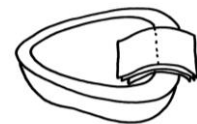
- Raise their head slightly higher than their hips to help urine and stool drain downward. Use pillows to raise your child’s head and chest as needed.
- Boys can use a urinal.
- Girls can use a bedpan. Make a “wick” from several layers of toilet paper. Place the wick over the bedpan, so it directs the urine into the bedpan. This helps keep urine from splashing the sides of the cast.



**Tuck a small diaper next to the skin**



**Place a large diaper on top**



**Make a “wick” of toilet paper**

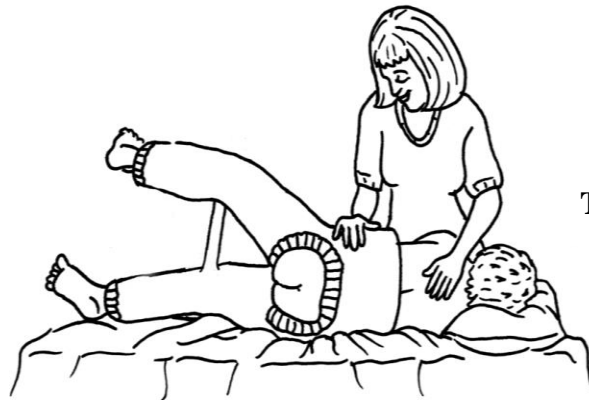
## What should I do about moving and positioning?

- Change your child’s position every 2 to 4 hours during the day and at least 1 time each night. This helps keep pressure off the skin to help prevent pressure sores and skin problems.
- **Never** use the bar between the legs to turn or lift your child. You could damage the cast.
- Use pillows or rolled blankets for support.
- Small children may fit into a wagon or stroller padded with pillows.
- Older children can use a reclining (moveable back) wheelchair.
- A reclining outdoor lounge chair may be used as a portable bed.
- Avoid knocking the cast against things. Check often for cracks, breaks, dents, tightness or looseness. Call your child’s doctor right away if you notice any of these.

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## Hip spica cast, continued

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Turning your child

### How can I help keep my child comfortable?

Use pillows and rolled blankets to help keep them comfortable. Your child can be on their back, side or tummy.

### What can I do about itching?

- **DO NOT** let your child put anything inside the cast to scratch. This could hurt their skin and lead to infection.
- Change your child's position often to shift the weight of the cast.
- Use a hair dryer or fan on cool setting to blow **cool** air under the cast.
- Help get your child's mind off the cast and their itching. You can use such things as play, books, music, TV or videos.
- If nothing works, ask your child's doctor about medicine for itching.

### What can I do to help prevent my child from getting bored?

Your child can take part in many "quiet" activities, such as:

- Toys. Make sure toys are big enough, so they cannot get stuck inside the cast.
- Books, video games, TV, music and storytelling
- Art projects
- Visits with friends
- Family activities

### What do I need to know about school and outside activities?

- Call your child's teachers to arrange for home study and return to classes as soon as possible.
- Your child can continue scouts, clubs and other social activities. They can watch their team play at sporting events.

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## Hip spica cast, continued

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### What do I need to know about travel?

- Ask a member of your child's care team **before you leave the hospital** about safety vests and special car seats made for children in hip spica casts.
- Place your child in the back seat of the car to use the vest or car seat.

### When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Numbness or tingling in their feet or around the cast
- Pain that is different than before
- Pain that does not get better with medicine ordered by the doctor
- Swelling of the feet or toes that do not "pink up" after 20 minutes of raising them above the level of the heart
- Does not move their toes as much or does not move them at all
- Change in skin color above or below the cast
- Red or irritated skin
- New sores
- Bad smell from inside the cast
- New blood stain on the cast after 2 days
- Fever over 100.5°F for longer than 24 hours with no other symptoms
- Cast gets loose, broken, cracked or soft
- A wet cast that does not dry all the way
- Something gets stuck inside the cast

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# Hip spica cast, continued

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## Your checklist

This list can help you keep track of what you need to know about your child’s cast. Ask your child’s nurse, therapist or doctor for help if you need more details.

### Before your child goes home, make sure you know:

- Why your child has a spica cast.
- How to wash your hands before and after you do cast care.
- How to:
  - “Petal” the cast.
  - Help with itching.
  - Give your child a sponge bath.
  - Dry your child’s skin and cast.
  - Diaper or toilet your child.
- How to check your child’s fingers, toes or skin for:
  - Good blood flow.
  - Good nerve sensation.
  - Skin problems.
  - Infection.
- How to:
  - Move and position your child.
  - Use a safety vest or special car seat as needed.
- How to get supplies.
- When to call your child’s doctor.

Notes \_\_\_\_\_

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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