

Fracture Care

****IMPORTANT: Due to the terminology used by insurance companies, any financial statements you receive from this office or your insurance company will utilize the term “surgery” when you are being treated for a fracture.****

Fractured means broken. Whether you have a complete or a partial fracture, you have a broken bone. A bone may be completely fractured or partially fractured in any number of ways (cross-wise, lengthwise, in the middle).

Care of Casts and Splints

Why splints and casts? Splints and casts support and protect injured bones and soft tissue, reducing pain, swelling, and muscle spasm. In some cases, splints and casts are applied following surgery.

Splints or "half-casts" provide less support than casts. However, splints can be adjusted to accommodate swelling from injuries easier than enclosed casts. Your doctor will decide which type of support will be best for you.

Getting used to the splint or cast:

If your treatment is to be successful, you must follow your doctor's instructions carefully. The following information provides general guidelines only, and is not a substitute for your doctor's advice. Swelling due to your injury may cause pressure in your splint or cast for the first 48 to 72 hours. This may cause your injured arm or leg to feel snug or tight in the splint or cast. To reduce the swelling:

- Elevate your injured arm or leg above your heart by propping it up 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.
- Move your uninjured, but swollen fingers or toes gently and often.
- 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.

Warning signs following splint or cast application. After application of a splint or cast, it is very important to elevate your injured arm or leg for 24 to 72 hours. The injured area should be elevated well above the heart. Rest and elevation greatly reduce pain and speed the healing process by minimizing early swelling. If you experience any of the following warning signs, contact your doctor's office immediately for advice.

- Increased pain, which may be caused by swelling, and the feeling that the splint or cast is too tight.
- Numbness and tingling in your hand or foot, which may be caused by too much pressure on the nerves.
- Burning and stinging, which may be caused by too much pressure on the skin.
- Excessive swelling below the cast, which may mean the cast is slowing your blood circulation.
- Loss of active movement of toes or fingers, which requires an urgent evaluation by your doctor.

Taking care of your splint or cast. 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. Some types of cast are water "tolerant". Be sure to ask your doctor before getting your cast wet. Water casts need to be dried with a blow dryer if gotten wet.
- Do not walk on a "walking cast" until it is completely dry and hard. It takes about one hour for fiberglass to completely harden.
- Keep dirt, sand, and powder away from the inside of your splint or cast.
- Do not pull out the padding from your splint or cast.
- 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 doctor.
- Do not break off rough edges of the cast or trim the cast before asking your doctor.
- Inspect the skin around the cast. If your skin becomes red or raw around the cast, contact your doctor.
- Inspect the cast regularly. If it becomes cracked or develops soft spots, contact your doctor's office.

Recovery and rehabilitation

Fractures take several weeks to several months to heal, depending the extent of the injury and how well you follow your doctor's advice. Pain usually stops long before the fracture is solid enough to handle the stresses of normal activity. It normally takes 4-6 weeks for broken bones to heal.

Even after your cast or brace is removed, you may need to continue limiting your activity until the bone is solid enough to use in normal activity. Usually, by the time the bone is strong enough, the muscles, for instance in your leg or arm, will be weak because they haven't been used. Your ligaments may feel "stiff" from not using them. You'll need a period of rehabilitation that involves exercises and gradually increasing activity before those tissues will perform their functions normally, and the healing process is complete.