

# caring for a child in a spica cast

A *spica cast* is a cast that begins below the chest and extends down the hips and legs. The patient will not be able to bend at the waist. There may be a bar that goes between the legs.

**Children who are potty trained may regress slightly in a cast so please use a diaper anyway! For a short time, surgery and pain medicines can affect the ability to feel the normal urge to need to use the restroom.**

**For children who are potty trained**, it may be necessary to use a bedpan. An adult helper will need to help them on the bedpan. To keep the back part of the cast dry when using the bedpan, it is helpful to use a disposable diaper tucked in the back of the cast.

To do this, turn the child on their tummy. Place the edge of the diaper in the back of the cast. The absorbent side of the diaper should be next to the child's skin. Then, fold the rear of the diaper up towards the waist so that the plastic is next to the back of the cast. Then, turn the child on their back and slip the bedpan under them. They should be placed on the bedpan so that the head is higher than the buttocks to keep urine from going up into the cast. When finished, gently roll your child on to his/her side, remove the bedpan and diaper and wipe skin dry.

**For children not yet potty trained**, you must tuck the diaper inside the cast opening with the plastic side next to the cast and the absorbent side next to the skin. **Do not** put the diaper on the **outside** of the cast. Change the diaper as soon as it becomes wet.

You may need to get up for diaper changes at night.

It is **very** important that the cast stays dry. Sanitary napkins (whole or cut in half) or urinary incontinent pads may be placed in the diaper for added absorbency. Do not cut diapers in half to make them smaller. This can make a gel-like substance form inside the cast when the loose diaper pieces get wet. The cast will most likely be fitted with a water-resistant liner that can be gently cleansed with a wet rag or diaper wipe.



## other tips

- Large size clothes or clothes with snaps are placed over the cast.
- If the cast becomes wet, dry it with a hair dryer on a **cool** setting.
- If the skin or cast becomes dirty, wipe with a damp cloth or diaper wipe.
- Never reach into the cast with a hard or sharp object even to skin you think you can visualize well.
- If itching is a problem, you may use a hair dryer set on **cool** setting to blow into the cast.
- Children with spica casts are not allowed to ride in an airplane or on a boat.

1. Place a smaller size diaper into the small opening in the cast. It should be large enough the edges can be tucked into the edges of the cast. Extra sanitary pads may be placed as well for extra absorbency. This will absorb most of the urine and stool.



2. The liner of the cast is water resistant and may be gently cleansed with a diaper wipe or damp cloth. Note that the edges are also covered with plastic tape to make the edges easier to clean.

3. Another diaper is placed over the top of the cast to hold everything in place.



### **more on cast care and positioning**

You may position your child in any comfortable position. The purpose of the cast is to hold everything in place during normal movements such as sitting and turning. Do not hesitate to hold your baby, or move your older child from room to room. You can prop your child on his/her side. It is also OK to turn your child on their stomach as long as you prop them up on pillows so they can breathe easily. An upright position is preferred for meals and is suggested for a little while after meals for improved digestion. It is strongly recommended to put infants on their side instead of their back for sleeping.

A wagon works well for transporting small children, but a wheelchair is needed for older children. Your doctor may write a prescription for a rental wheelchair with a reclining back, removable side arms, and elevating leg rests.

### **infections**

The incisions are dressed well and not usually affected by urine or stool. After the first two days following surgery, the incisions are usually healed well enough to keep out any additional moisture. However, infections do occur in one to two patients per hundred. One sign of infection may be a foul smell from the cast. If this, or other concerns develop please contact our office.

### **rashes and skin problems**

Casts like this are warm inside. This can lead to heat rash, especially if the cast is wet most of the time. In the summer, keep clothing to the minimum that is comfortable. It can be almost impossible to avoid some skin irritation. It usually clears up quickly after the cast has been removed. Some powder or medicated lotions can be applied to the skin that is easily visualized inside the cast. It is best not to pour powder into the cast because it can cake up in places that are not easily reached for cleaning. Blow drying on a **cool** setting can often relieve skin itching and irritation. If the rash becomes severe, then please contact our office. Sometimes the openings in the cast can be enlarged for easier cleaning.

Children who do not communicate well should be shifted or slightly turned every few hours so that they do not lie in one spot and develop pressure sores. Foul smell after a week or so in a cast can indicate a pressure sore.

### **diet**

Pain medications can cause constipation; diet is important. Extra fluids should be encouraged for the first few days while taking pain medications. Also foods such as green vegetables, fruits and cereals help prevent constipation. Avoid overeating because it can cause discomfort due to pressure in the cast.

**If the spica or body cast becomes too tight or your child seems to be having trouble breathing, you must return to our office or go to your local emergency department immediately.**

## **automobile travel**

Children who can sit up in their cast may be able to use a standard car seat or lap belt with a booster under their cast. The lap belt should be placed low across the hips and the shoulder strap across the chest.

There are several types of special car seats and vests to restrain children in spica casts. The social workers and nurses at the hospital will help you plan for your needs at home and issue a car seat if necessary.

*This handout is for general information only and should not be considered complete. For more specific information, please ask your child's health care provider.*

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