

## What is a shoulder spica?

A shoulder spica is a cast that fits around your child's chest, shoulder and arm. It helps keep your child's shoulder in a certain position to keep it from moving. A shoulder spica cast:

- Is used for certain fractures (breaks in the bone) of the shoulder.
- Helps improve shoulder movement when Botox is used to loosen muscles.
- Protects the shoulder after surgery. If your child is having surgery, they will get their shoulder spica before they wake up from anesthesia (medicine to make them sleep).

## How do I care for my child's cast?

Call the doctor if your child's cast is too tight.

- The cast should have a comfortable fit. If not, it could cause rubbing. Your child's cast has extra padding to help. If it still rubs, your child is at risk for pressure sores in places like the:
  - Top of the shoulder.
  - Back of the hand.
  - Between the thumb and index (pointer) finger.
  - Chest.
  - Back.
  - Pelvis (lower part of the belly between the hip bones).
- Other signs your child's cast is too tight include:
  - Trouble taking in a deep breath.
  - Pressure on the belly after a meal.

Check the skin around and under the edges of the cast each day. The skin should not be dry, red or irritated.

- Keep rough edges of the cast covered with moleskin.
- Do not force moleskin under the cast.
- Do not trim the cast.

Do not allow any moisture on the cast. It must stay dry.

- Only give your child sponge baths. They may not take baths or showers.
  - Check your child's skin. Look carefully in spots where rubbing can happen.
  - Cover the entire cast with plastic bags. Use waterproof tape to hold down the edges of the bags.
  - Use a damp – not wet – cloth and mild soap to clean the skin. Dry it with a towel.
- If needed between sponge baths, you may use baby wipes to clean your child's skin.
- Do not use lotions, oils, powder or creams around the edges or under the cast.

## What about itching?

- DO NOT let your child put anything inside the cast. This could hurt the skin and cause infection.
- Gently pat the cast above the area that itches.
- Keep your child as cool as possible.
- Use a hair dryer to blow cool air under the cast.
- If the itching is very bad, ask your child's doctor about medicine for itching.

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

# Shoulder spica cast care, continued

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## How do I check for feeling and blood flow?

Make sure the cast is not too tight and that blood can flow well around the cast. **Every 8 hours, or more often if needed, be sure to check these things for at least 1 to 2 days after the cast is placed:**

- Movement – have your child move or wiggle their fingers. (This also helps prevent stiffness.)
- Feeling (sensation) – touch the area above and below the cast to make sure it feels normal to your child.
- Blood flow (circulation) – press briefly on your child’s middle fingernail. When it turns white, let go. The pink color should return within 3 seconds.
- Temperature – check to make sure their hand is warm. If cold, cover it with a blanket and check again in 20 minutes. Check feeling and blood flow if it is still cold.
- Swelling – look for swelling above and below the cast. A little swelling is normal, but a lot of swelling is not. Compare the arm with the cast to the other one. If there is swelling, raise it above the level of the heart for 1 hour.

## What clothes should my child wear?

- Your child may need to wear larger-sized clothes, such as baggy t-shirts and jumpers. It will be easier for these to go over the cast.
- You may also alter your child’s clothes by splitting the side seam and adding Velcro closures.

## How should my child sleep?

- Lay your child flat on their back to sleep. Use a pillow under their head and upper body for support.
- Your child may also lie on the side where they did not have surgery. It will be hard for them to lie on the other side.

## How should I feed my child?

- Cover your child’s cast with a towel while they eat. This will help keep the cast clean.
- Your child may eat and drink like normal.
- Your child should avoid fizzy drinks and very large meals. These could make your child feel bloated inside the cast.

## Does my child need to limit their activity?

It is important for your child to stay moving and active, even if it is only gentle walking.

- Let your child move around as much as possible during the day. Change their position often. This helps prevent pressure on any one area.
- Talk with the doctor about other activities your child should keep doing while wearing a cast.

## What about riding in a car?

After surgery, it is safe for your child to use their car seat. Check that your child has a correct fit in their car seat before the day of surgery. A special car seat or vest is rarely needed.

- Part of a correct fit is based on the width of your child’s shoulders.

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# Shoulder spica cast care, continued

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- Sit your child with their back and bottom against the back of the car seat. Your child’s shoulders should fit easily within the shell at the upper part of the car seat.
  - The cast will be stiff and may take up a little more space at the shoulders. The cast should not change your child’s fit in the car seat (unless the car seat was too narrow before surgery).
  - If your child’s shoulders fit snugly within the shell of their current car seat, please bring a different car seat for the day of surgery and for the recovery time after surgery.
- If your child uses a forward facing car seat:
  - The internal harness straps should fit at or just above shoulder level.
  - The chest clip should be at armpit level. This is the same as before surgery and the cast.
- If your child uses a booster seat:
  - The seat belt will cross their shoulder between their neck and arm.
  - The lap belt should lay as low as possible and touch your child’s thighs.

## What else do I need to know?

### Do NOT:

- Try to remove, change or adjust your child’s spica cast.
- Let your child drive while they have a cast.
- Let your child sit close to a fire. The cast may get hot and burn their skin.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

### Call the doctor right away if your child has any of these problems:

Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decreased or loss of movement in the fingers</li></ul>
Feeling (sensation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Numbness or tingling</li><li>• Pain that is different than before</li><li>• Pain that does not get better with medicine</li></ul>
Blood flow (circulation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pink color that does not return to nails in 3 seconds after briefly pressing down and letting go</li><li>• Change in skin color above or below the cast</li></ul>
Temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hand that is still cold after covering it</li><li>• Fever (temperature of 100.4 F or higher) for longer than 24 hours with no other symptoms</li></ul>
Swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New or very bad swelling that does not go down</li></ul>
Skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Red or irritated skin</li><li>• Sores</li></ul>

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Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bad smell coming from inside the cast</li><li>• Bright red drainage on the cast or a new blood stain after 2 days</li><li>• Drainage around the cast</li></ul>
Cast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cracked or broken cast</li><li>• Loose or soft cast</li><li>• Cast that is too tight</li><li>• Wet cast that does not dry all the way</li><li>• Something stuck in the cast</li></ul>

## Your checklist

Use this list to keep track of what you need to know before going home. Talk with your child’s nurse, physical therapist (PT) or doctor if you have questions.

- Why your child has a shoulder spica cast
- How to check the skin and help with itching
- How to “petal” the cast
- How to cover the cast before a sponge bath
- How to check feeling and blood flow
- How to move and position your child
- How to use a car seat or seat belt
- How to get supplies
- When to call the doctor
- When to schedule a follow-up visit

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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