

About Your Cast

Self-care at home

This handout is for patients who have had a cast applied at Harborview Medical Center. It explains self-care and when to call the clinic.

What is a cast?

Casts are made of either plaster (white) or fiberglass (various colors). They are used to hold a broken bone in place as it heals. Casts may also be used to help a bone or joint rest when there is pain with movement.

How long will my cast take to harden?

Be extra careful with your cast for the next 2 days. During this time, it will be easy to crack or break the cast. Your cast will feel hard about 20 minutes after it is put on. But it can take up to 2 days to dry fully.



Be sure to protect your cast from getting wet (see page 2).

When to Call

Call the clinic at 206.744.4830 and press 2, or seek medical help **right away** if:

- You have new pain, or your pain is getting worse
- You feel any burning, chaffing, or pressure under the cast
- You have a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher
- Your skin or nails below the cast become blue or grey, or they feel cold
- Your skin, fingers, or toes below the cast become numb or tingly (“pins and needles”)
- You cannot move your fingers or toes
- You see bleeding or drainage coming from under the cast

- A bad smell is coming from under the cast
- Your cast is too loose, causing your skin to rub under the cast
- You have any unusual feeling under the cast

Cast Care

- Keep the cast dry and clean. If the cast gets wet, use a hairdryer on cool setting to dry it.
- When you shower, cover the cast with:
 - A cast cover. You can buy a cast cover at many drugstores.
 - A heavy plastic bag. Make sure there are no holes in the bag. Seal the bag at the top of the cast.
- To lessen swelling, keep the cast raised when you are resting. Prop your arm or leg up on a pillow. This is very helpful the first 24 to 72 hours after the cast is applied.
- Do **not** put powder, lotion, or anything else under the cast.
- Do **not** scratch under the cast with any object.
- If itching bothers you, try using a hairdryer to blow **cold** air under the cast. Or, you can take Benadryl, which you can buy at the drugstore without a prescription.
- Avoid heat and sweating. This can make the cast uncomfortable and smelly.
- Do **not** change or trim the cast in any way. If you alter the cast, it could take longer for your broken bone to heal.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Harborview Foot and Ankle Clinic: Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call 206.744.4830.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the Harborview Community Careline at 206.744.2500.

Medicine Refills

It takes 48 hours to refill prescriptions, so call before you run out of your pain medicine. If you need a refill of your medicine:

- Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call the Orthopedic Pharmacists at 206.744.8701.
- After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the Harborview Community Careline at 206.744.2500.