

CAST *AFTERCARE* GUIDELINES

Congratulations! You/Your Child has just gotten your cast off. There is a normal course of recovery, which we have outlined for you.

Skin - All skin is dry following cast removal. Unless you are directed otherwise, no specific treatment is required. A skin moisturizer may help speed the return of normal appearing skin. The skin that was under a cast, especially in the knee and elbow creases, bleeds easily when scratched vigorously and is extremely sensitive to sun. *It is of utmost importance to protect the skin from UV light exposure with clothing or sun block*

Stiffness - It is normal to have some degree of stiffness following cast removal.

Recovery depends mainly on three factors: *Duration, Severity, and Location* of the injury. A fourth factor is emotion; fearful patients take longer, daredevils take less time. Most pediatric patients, unlike their adult counterparts, do not require physical therapy following cast removal.

a. *Duration* - The longer a cast is on, the more time required to obtain a full range of motion.

b. *Severity* - More severe fractures are associated with stiffness. This is because the muscles, tendons, or ligaments surrounding the bone get bruised, too.

c. *Location* - As a general rule, the closer a fracture is to a joint, the more stiffness will be encountered at that joint .

For example, a severe fracture near the elbow immobilized for 6 weeks in a tentative individual may take up to *two times the casted period* for recovery, while a very active child who was casted for a 'buckle' or 'greenstick' fracture for 3 weeks may start to use his or her hand normally the same day as the cast was removed.

Limping - If a cast was placed for a lower extremity fracture, it is normal to limp for an extended period of time. This follows the rule for *stiffness, as above*. Only rarely is physical therapy required for a limp, which can last up to *two times the casted period*.

Swelling/Discoloration - There is usually some degree of swelling or discoloration even weeks after a fracture (or sprain) is healed. This is part of the healing process and does not preclude a return to normal activities or gym class (P.E.).

Exercises - Your doctor may prescribe exercises following cast removal to promote flexibility and increase strength. *Never manipulate or force a patient to move a recently casted extremity*. Gentle exercises to promote range of motion are always safe such as "alphabet" exercises for the ankle, or *gentle* flexion-extension exercises for the wrist, knee or elbow.