

# Patient Education



ARNOLD PALMER HOSPITAL  
For Children  
*Supported by Arnold Palmer Medical Center Foundation*

Orthopedic Center  
at Arnold Palmer Hospital  
83 W. Columbia St. Orlando, FL 32806  
321-841-3040 f:321-841-3049

## General Post-operative Instructions

### **Pain management:**

Take the prescribed narcotic pain medication as long as needed and as indicated on the bottle. As your child's pain decreases over the next few days, you may begin to space out the doses (from every 4 hours to every 5 hours, to every 6 hours, etc.)

Remember, many of the pain medicines already contain Tylenol (acetaminophen) and so Tylenol should not be taken with them. Usually, you can, however, use an anti-inflammatory such as motrin or ibuprofen between pain medicine doses.

As your child's pain improves further, try plain Tylenol during the day instead of the narcotic pain medicine. After a few days, try plain Tylenol at night instead of the narcotic pain medicine.

### **Incision:**

Dissolving stitches were used underneath the skin. Sometimes, one long suture is woven underneath the skin instead of using over-the-top stitches like those used to close cuts in the emergency room. Sometimes, multiple dissolvable stitches are visible. There are no stitches to remove. Ends of the dissolving sutures are sometimes left out of the skin and can be allowed to drop off as they dissolve at the level of the skin, or the ends may be trimmed to the skin level with fingernail clippers one week or more after surgery.

Steri-strips are placed across the cut to keep the tension off the incision. These tapes are not holding the skin together, but they decrease the tension and may help make a smaller scar. It is recommended to leave these tapes directly on the skin for two to three weeks. If they peel off before two weeks, then they can be replaced with new ones from any pharmacy. This is almost never needed. Sometimes the steri-strips stick to the skin for many weeks. They can be allowed to peel off on their own, or they can be peeled off after three weeks.

### **Bandages:**

Bandages and wraps are used to keep blood from getting on clothes, sheets, or other things. We prefer if you leave the bandage placed at the time of surgery for the first \_\_\_\_\_. If the bandages become bloody, then they can be changed without any risk of causing an infection. The skin is a good barrier to infection, so please change the bandages if they are too tight, or if they become bloody.

Generally, the surgical bandages stay in place for \_\_\_\_\_ days until it is more comfortable to remove them, but they can stay on longer without causing infections. When casts are used, the same bandages stay in place for weeks at a time until the cast is changed. There is no increased rate of infection when this is done. If the bandages become bloody, then they need to be changed sooner to keep the sheets and clothes from getting bloody. When the removed bandages become clean, you may stop wearing them.

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## Showers and baths:

After \_\_\_\_\_ days, the incision is sealed enough to take a shower. Remove the bandages except for the steri-strips and take a normal shower. Water can run over the incision and it can be washed gently, but it is not necessary to wash the incision for a week after surgery.

Two weeks after surgery, it is safe to take a bath or go swimming in a pool with the tapes on the skin. If they float off, the tapes can be reapplied with some purchased from a pharmacy. No beach or lake for 2 weeks.

See below if a cast has been applied after surgery.

## Fevers and infections:

Fever is common for the first 48 hours after surgery. This is a normal response to injury and does not mean that an infection is occurring. Drink plenty of fluids and take deep breaths to help clear the body of drugs and chemicals used for anesthesia and surgery. When there is a fever more than 101°F more than two days after surgery, then that should be reported to the office.

Normal incisions look a little red, but the skin around it is usually red right next to the cut. More than two days after surgery, if the redness extends ½ inch or more from the incision, and the wound is hot, tender, or draining then this should be reported even if there is not a fever. Generally, an infection at a surgical site will resemble a sunburn that begins growing outward from the wound. Some wounds have a tendency to drain for several days after surgery. As long as the drainage decreases, this is ok. An increase in drainage should be reported.

## Ice:

The swelling can be helped by elevation and ice for the first 24 hours after surgery. Beyond that time it is probably not helpful. Ice packs can be applied continuously with a towel or bandage between the skin and the ice pack. Or, Ice can be applied for 30 minutes every two hours or so. Any cooling will help reduce the swelling, but sometimes the ice is difficult to tolerate when it is too close to the skin or too cold. Ice after a few days can help reduce pain, but it doesn't do anything to help swelling. Be careful to keep bandages or casts dry when using ice.

Heat is recommended for stiff muscles, but this is only later when things are healed and muscles need to be exercised.

## Swelling and Elevation:

When fluid gets out of the veins it causes swelling. Swelling is not harmful and will not slow the healing process. But swelling in the first 2-3 days after surgery stretches the tissues and worsens the pain of surgery. For the first 48 hours after surgery, swelling can be reduced by elevating the arm or leg higher than the heart. This allows the fluid to flow back to the heart just like water will flow downhill. This is most important for the first day or two after surgery. Swelling can still occur for several weeks after ankle or foot surgery because the foot is so far from the heart and standing increases the fluid pressure in the foot. Muscles also pump fluid back

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to the heart, so exercising the muscles will help reduce the swelling that can occur more than one week following surgery.

Also, there can be some increased swelling after the cast is removed because the pressure from the cast was keeping the swelling down. Also, weak muscles cause swelling. Exercise and muscle strengthening will help reduce the swelling after a cast is removed. Some foot and ankle swelling is common for many weeks after leg or foot surgery.

## **Casts and Splints:**

Casts are used to help protect the bone from abnormal movement. Casts often need to include the joint above and the joint below the injured area to stop all the muscles that cross the injured area. Sometimes, when a lot of swelling is expected to occur, your doctor may choose to use a “splint” rather than a cast. This is similar to a cast but does not wrap all the way around the limb to allow even more swelling.

After surgery, most casts are split to allow room for swelling. If the cast is too tight in the first day after surgery, it causes pain and needs to be spread apart. The doctor should be called when the pain is severe after the cast has been spread to relieve swelling and pain medicines aren't working.

For the first few days after surgery a split cast provides plenty of support because the child isn't going to be very active. A week or so after surgery, it is necessary to wrap a split cast with another layer of fiberglass or plaster to allow increased activities when the pain is decreasing.

Casts are padded inside, but should be kept as dry as possible to prevent itching. Fiberglass casts breathe to some extent and are usually more comfortable than plaster casts. Fiberglass also won't break down if it gets wet. So, try to keep the cast dry. But, if it gets wet, then dry it with a hair dryer on the low setting. If the cast itches, then use the hair dryer instead of putting things down the cast and instead of using powders that can cake up inside the cast.

Casts are often used in children to protect them from themselves. So, you don't need to worry too much about a child in a cast. They don't have to use slings or avoid walking on the cast in most cases. If they walk on the cast, a cast shoe is recommended to soften the pressure on the cast. Cast shoes are canvas and rubber. If you don't have a cast shoe, then a cheap adult tennis shoe or sandal can be put on the cast after the toe part is cut off to shorten the shoe.

When a cast is removed, the body part is stiff for several days or longer depending on how long the cast was needed. It hurts to move something that hasn't moved in several weeks, so don't be surprised if there is some mild pain when moving the joints right after the cast is removed. Also, there can be some increased swelling after the cast is removed because the pressure from the cast was keeping the swelling down. Also, weak muscles cause swelling. Exercise and muscle strengthening will help reduce the swelling after a cast is removed. Some foot and ankle swelling are common for many weeks after leg, or foot surgery.

A broken cast needs to be replaced. It's OK if there is a little shredding around the edges, but loss of support from a completely broken cast needs to be fixed with a cast change.