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# Total Contact Cast Information for Patients



## **What is a total contact cast?**

A total contact cast is a fiberglass shell. The shell fits your leg and foot very closely. It touches, or is in contact with, your whole foot - that's why it is called a total contact cast. You will be given a special cast shoe to protect the bottom of the cast when you're walking.

The total contact cast is used to treat two main conditions in the diabetic foot:

- neuropathic foot ulcers - the cast helps by protecting skin on the person's foot. It ensures that the whole foot bears equal weight, and this in turn relieves pressure on the area that is ulcerated. The cast is usually put on over the dressing, and so the foot is not redressed until the cast is changed. Total contact casting can be very a very effective treatment for some foot ulcers, and will help most ulcers heal in 6 to 8 weeks.
- 'Charcot' foot, or Neuropathic fractures.

## **What do I need to know about my cast?**

Depending on the type of cast you have, complete drying will take between 4-24 hours after it is first fitted. Your team will tell you what kind of cast you have. It is important that you don't put any weight on the cast while it's drying.

You should do as little walking as possible after the cast dries. The reasons are:

1. The ulcer / fracture will heal faster if you put less pressure on it.
2. Your leg with the cast is longer than your other leg. This can cause pain in your hip or back if you walk too much.
3. You are less stable when you're wearing a cast. Your chances of falling and hurting yourself are increased. The less you walk, the less likely you are to fall. Be very careful on slippery or uneven ground. Use crutches for added stability. If you were already unsteady before wearing the cast, it is a good idea to use a walking frame.
4. When you're sitting down, put your leg up on a chair or pillow whenever possible.
5. Casting material can be quite rough and scratchy. While you're sleeping, you might kick or rub your other leg with the cast. This could cause skin damage on your other leg. It is a good idea to put a thick, soft knee-high sock over your other leg before you go to bed.

## Can I get my cast wet?

No. You won't be able to take regular baths or showers because you have to keep the cast dry. Take sponge baths instead. Your team can give you details of plastic protectors so that you can shower.

Try not to go outside when the weather is wet. If you must go outside when it's wet, wrap your cast in a plastic bag. Don't shovel snow or walk in the rain.

## When should I call my team?

Call your team straight away if any of the things listed below happen. Remember that you don't have good pain sensation (ability to feel pain) in your foot / leg, so you might not be able to feel if something is wrong. You must check your cast (or have someone else check it) every day. Look out for these things:

- The cast is loose. The cast should fit your leg very tightly. If it becomes loose, it could rub against your leg or foot and cause a new ulcer.
- The cast is too tight
- You are experiencing pain or discomfort – for example, tight pain, numbness or burning sensation that is abnormal for you.
- Dents, cracks, staining, soft areas and other damage to the cast. A dent or other damage can apply dangerous levels of pressure to your leg, and you might not be able to feel it.
- A smell coming from the cast. This could be a sign of an infection that started after the cast was put on.

You should call your team **immediately** if:

- Your temperature rises above 37.5 degrees C, and remains high for 4 hours
- Your blood glucose rises above 15mmol/l (or, if there is a sharp rise that is unusual for you that you cannot attribute to anything)
- You feel unwell, tired, hot, shivery, with flu-like symptoms

## Is there anything else I should know?

### NEVER

- Get your cast wet
- Poke, pour or spray anything down your cast - You may have some itching under the cast. Don't slide anything down the cast to scratch the itch because you could very easily hurt the skin underneath. You might try gently rubbing the same area on your other foot. Sometimes that helps.

You are advised not to drive whilst in plaster, as this may invalidate your insurance.

Please contact your team with any queries about your cast. Out of hours, contact your local Accident and Emergency department.

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