

## Caring for a child in a Hip Spica cast



Physiotherapy Department

**The aim of this information leaflet is to provide parents of children treated in Hip Spica casts with information and ideas about ways to cope at home. After demonstration by the Physiotherapists or nursing staff about how to care for your child in a hip spica, you will be encouraged to participate in his or her care during your child's hospital stay so you feel confident managing at home.**

## **What is a hip spica?**

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A hip spica is a type of plaster that covers one leg down to the knee and the other (treated) leg down to the toes up to belly button level. There is an area around the groin cut out for toileting. It is used after hip surgery or after fractures of the femur to prevent movement of the affected area so it can heal. Coping with a hip spica may at first appear difficult, but you and your child will get used to it quickly.



## Commonly asked questions:

### Will my child fit into their car seat and pushchair?



- We can usually manage this. Please bring your child's car seat and pushchair to the ward as soon as possible. They often need modifications such as padding with towels or extended straps to allow your child to fit when they have the plaster on.
- Every attempt is made to fit children into their own things, however sometimes this isn't possible. We do have spares which may fit if yours does not, but we cannot guarantee their availability.
- Please remember it is illegal for your child to travel in a car unrestrained.
- The plaster increases the weight of your child. This might mean that they are too heavy for their current car seat and may need to graduate to the next option.

## What effect does the cast have on my child going to the toilet?

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- Care of the toileting area of your child's cast is important to help maintain the comfort of your child as well as keeping the cast dry and able to work effectively. A hip spica will rarely be changed because it smells due to soiling and urine staining.

- Sleek (a waterproof tape) will be applied around the edges of the plaster in the groin area to help to prevent urine and faeces from soaking into the plaster.



- Nappies need to be checked often (at least every two hours during the day and every three to four hours during the night at first).
- Nappies need to be changed as soon as they are wet or soiled.

- We advise you to use two nappies with a smaller one inside and a larger one over the cast. A sanitary pad or pleat of cotton wool inside the first nappy will increase the absorbency and minimise the risk of leaks out the back. You will need to experiment and find out what works best for your child.



- Older children can use a urine bottle, bedpan or commode for toileting. They can be lifted onto the toilet, making sure they are sitting as upright as possible. You will be demonstrated how to position your child on the bedpan so that the urine and faeces do not come in contact with the plaster. Plaster is like blotting paper and tends to soak up moisture, so it is important to keep your child's sat up whilst on the pan or toilet so that the urine will not run back inside the plaster.
- A few drops of lavender or eucalyptus oil can be used on the plaster if it develops a smell from urine or faeces (use only very small amounts so the plaster doesn't soften).
- A wet spica is difficult to dry. Try leaving the toileting area open to air, or using a hair dryer on a cool setting only. Positioning of your child with their head elevated above the level of their hips can also prevent urine or faeces from soiling the cast. Positioning your child on his or her stomach with the nappy off will help to dry the back of the plaster if it gets wet.



## How should I lift my child?

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- When lifting or picking your child up, it is important to support them as well as the weight of the plaster. Do not lift them under the arms without supporting the plaster as well.
- Keep your child as close as possible to your own body when picking them up and bend your knees. This helps prevent straining your back and ensures your child feels secure.
- A small child can be cuddled in the same way as before they went into plaster without fear of hurting them.
- Older children in hip spicas can be very heavy and you may need two people to prevent you injuring your back.
- If there is a bar across the legs, this can be used for lifting.
- With an older child you can get them to assist you.



## How should I position my child?

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- Children in a hip spica cannot move easily, so you will need to change their position often. Position changes are necessary to avoid getting sores under the plaster.
- Children can be positioned on their back, either side or stomach, using pillows or rolled up towels for support. A beanbag is an excellent way of achieving a comfortable position.
- Every time you change the position, check that the plaster is not digging in or too tight around the edges (tummy, ankles, groin and knees). This also includes when placing them in the car.



- Make sure your child's heels/feet can be moved freely after each position change. Ensure their feet are not pressed into the mattress/ chair, which could cause pressure areas.
- If your child develops a reddened area on his or her back at the spine, he or she may need to spend more time on their stomach.



## How should I bathe my child?

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- The hip spica is not waterproof so avoid getting it wet.
- Washing your child in a hip spica is done by using a bowl of water and a face cloth (a sponge bath).
- Hair washing can be done over the edge of a sink or bath with a jug.

## Are there any changes to my child's diet while in the spica cast?

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- Breastfeeding infants can and should continue to breastfeed. You may need to experiment with different positions to find one that suits you best.
- If your child is eating solids, you may need to feed smaller meals more often because the plaster is tighter around the stomach, rather than 3 larger meals a day.
- You should sit your child as upright as possible when feeding.
- Encourage plenty of fruit and vegetables and fluids to help prevent constipation and to promote healing.

## How should I dress my child?

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- Your child will probably need to wear larger clothing so that it can fit over a hip spica. Stretchy tights and leggings are useful for girls, tracksuit bottoms work well for boys.
- Smaller children may only need a T-shirt or jumper and socks, the plaster will actually keep them quite warm. Larger children can be dressed in underwear and trousers that have been altered with velcro or poppers down the side so they can fit over the plaster.
- Where there is a bar between the knees, it maybe easier to place the velcro or poppers on the inside of the legs.

## How should I look after my child's skin?

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- Skin around the edges of the plaster should be checked every day for redness, blisters, pressure areas or skin irritations.
- Your child will continue to grow with a hip spica on, so check regularly to make sure the plaster is not too tight.
- Powders and creams should only be used on skin that you can see as under the plaster this can cause skin irritations.
- Be sure that your child does not poke things down the plaster and they can cause skin grazes and may also become stuck.

## How do I keep my child entertained?

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- Your child will adjust to being in a hip spica very quickly and should continue with their regular routines.
- Toys should be placed within reach due to reduced mobility.
- Frequent scenery changes will help with boredom.



## When should I call for help?

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- Any sores or blisters on the skin noticed under the edges of the cast.
- High temperature which cannot be explained by a cold, ear infection or other illness.
- Cracks, breaks or softening of the plaster.
- Prolonged, unexplained irritability.
- Toes that are persistently blue, reddened, swollen, very hot or very cold.
- Unusual odour from the plaster which cannot be explained by soiling.
- If the cast has become too tight.

## Key points to remember

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- Hip spicas are not waterproof and should never be immersed in water.
- Nappies need to be changed as soon as they are wet or dirty to help keep the plaster clean and dry.
- If you notice an odour (not from urine or faeces) coming from under the plaster, contact Hascombe ward (phone number below) or visit your nearest emergency department.

## Key reference source

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STEPS charity website: [www.steps-charity.org.uk](http://www.steps-charity.org.uk)



## Contact details

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### Helen Troughton

Team Leader Paediatric Physiotherapist

Physiotherapy Department

**Telephone:** 01483 464 153

**Bleep:** 71-0907

### Hascombe Ward

**Telephone:** 01483 464071

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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