

# Looking after your child in a spica cast

## Information for parents and carers

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Your child requires a special plaster cast, called a spica (pronounced 'spy-kah'), following an operation for their hip or leg condition.

Your child's doctor, nurse or therapist may have asked you to read this information to help you prepare for caring for your child in a spica.

### What is a spica?

A spica is a cast that is similar to a pair of high-waisted shorts or trousers, with a space in the groin area for toileting and personal care. There is a soft inner liner, and the outer layer is a hard shell. Occasionally there is a reinforcing bar between the legs.

### Why does my child need a spica?

The spica holds your child's leg in the correct position to allow it to heal after their hip or leg operation. Occasionally a hip brace can be used instead of a spica and if this is an option for your child your doctor will discuss this with you.

### How to prepare for caring for your child in spica



This is a picture of a **baby** in her spica after she had her operation at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People. If your child is old enough it may be a good idea to show them this picture to help them understand what their spica will look like. Any siblings or other relatives may feel better prepared if they also see this picture.

If the spica is put on following a planned operation, then the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Teams will be in contact beforehand to discuss how to look after your child at home, and assess whether any special or additional equipment is required. They will advise you about moving, handling and positioning your child.

If it is put on after an emergency operation, you will receive this advice after your child's operation.

## What happens when you come to hospital?

Your child will either be admitted to the Surgical Admissions Ward known as Crichton or the Surgical Ward named Dunvegan. You will meet the medical and nursing team looking after your child, including the surgeon that will operate on your child, and the 'sleepy medicine' doctors, also called anaesthetists.

You can read more about the anaesthetists here:

<https://children.nhsllothian.scot/departments-services/anaesthetic>



Before your child has their operation, including having the spica put on, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This will be explained in full to you by the team caring for your child.

When your child is ready to go for their operation and spica application they will be taken by the nursing staff to the operating theatre. One parent/carer will be able to go with them and stay until they have had their anaesthetic and fall asleep.

You can read more about theatres here:

<https://children.nhsllothian.scot/departments-services/surgery>



## What happens after the operation and spica application?

Once your child returns from the operating theatre to the ward, our orthopaedic practitioner will review your child. The orthopaedic practitioner and nurses will show you how to change your child's nappy, or help you with toileting, and advise about positioning. If you require additional equipment for toileting the occupational therapist will arrange this for you and give you advice on how to use any new equipment.

The physiotherapist will check any other equipment, such as car seats and buggies, with you and advise you about moving and handling and positioning your child comfortably.

See more about the physios here:

<https://children.nhsllothian.scot/departments-services/physiotherapy>



The surgeon will review your child and advise if your child requires any x-rays or scans to check the position of their hips before you go home. They will let you know when they need to see your child in hospital next. This could be for a check-up in clinic, for an outpatient appointment for cast removal or for a change of spica in the operating theatre while asleep, which may include an overnight stay.

Your child may need a spica for weeks or months depending on the condition and operation your child has had. The planned time your child will be in spica will be fully explained to you before you go home.

## How long will my child be in hospital?

This depends on the reason the spica was required and can vary from child to child. We will try to give you an idea of the expected time you will be in hospital before your child's operation, but this isn't possible for all children.

## What happens when the spica is removed?

You will be given an outpatient appointment to return to the hospital when the spica is ready to be removed. There is normally no need for your child to have an overnight stay in hospital or any anaesthetic for the spica removal.

Not all children require painkillers for the cast to be removed. The team looking after your child will let you know in advance of your appointment if you need to give your child any painkillers before coming to hospital. It is worth being aware that for some children the sensation of being free of the spica can take some time to get used to.

If your child is normally mobile, they may not be keen to get back to moving around initially and they should be allowed to get back to this in their own time. Physiotherapy may be required for some children, and we will arrange this for your child if needed.

If any changes are needed with any of the equipment you have for your child, the therapists and nurses will advise you at this appointment.

## Things to be aware of at home

**Please check the cast every day and contact us immediately if you have any of the following concerns:**

- **Cast soiling:**
  - It is essential that the spica is kept clean and dry. We will provide you with spare 'tear away strips' of special, sticky tape. This tape is applied to the edges of the spica in the nappy area and should be replaced if there is soiling. We will also show you how to change the nappies to minimise the chance of soiling, and we would ask you to change nappies at more regular intervals than you might normally.
  - Please do not stick anything to the cast as this can reduce the cast's breathability.
  - Please contact us immediately if the cast is soiled, or if there is any odour, ooze or wetness coming from the cast (contact details at the end of this page).
- **Skin problems:**
  - Your child's skin can become red and sore if the lining of the spica becomes wet or soiled, or if they have been lying in the same position for too long. If your child can't move on their own in the cast we may ask you to change their position on a regular basis – often every 2 hours to begin with.
  - Your child's heels can become sore if there is too much pressure on them. It is important that the weight of your child's leg is not resting on their heels to prevent a pressure ulcer.
- **Circulation:**
  - If your child's toes are cold, blue, or white, or they complain of pins and needles or numbness, there may be a problem with the blood circulation or swelling. This is very rare and should be reviewed in A&E.

- **Tightness:**
  - Occasionally the spica can become too tight around your child's tummy or around their feet. Often this can be managed by changing your child's position and we will give you advice about this before you go home.
- **Bruising and swelling:**
  - If your child has also had surgery for their pelvic bone, it is very common for there to be bruising and swelling in the groin and genital area.
- **Itch:**
  - It is common for your child to complain of being itchy. Please do not put anything under the cast to scratch the skin. If the itch persists, then some children can be given an antihistamine, but please speak to your doctor or pharmacist before giving any new medicines.
  - Please make sure your child is not getting too hot or sweaty. The spica keeps the child's lower body warm and, particularly in summer months, minimal clothing is required.
- **Cast breakage:**
  - It is very unusual for the spica to soften, loosen, split, or break, but it is possible. Do not attempt to make any repairs to the spica yourself.
- **Problems related to your child's operation:**
  - The doctor will let you know any additional problems to look out for specific to the operation your child has had.

## How to get in touch

For general questions please contact the hospital switchboard on **0131 536 0000** and ask for either your consultant's secretary or the ward where your child was being looked after when they had their operation.

If you have urgent concerns, for example, lots of swelling or a sudden increase in pain, you should contact NHS24 by calling 111, or visit children's Accident and Emergency. In a life-threatening emergency, always call 999.

## Further information

More information about spicas and videos can be found at:

[www.stepsworldwide.org/conditions/hip-dysplasia-ddh/](http://www.stepsworldwide.org/conditions/hip-dysplasia-ddh/)

Although if you have any questions, you are best to ask us directly through the contact details above.



## Cancellation

While we make every effort to avoid this, there is always a risk that your child's operation may be cancelled at short notice. This is due to either emergency patients who require urgent surgery or other reasons which are beyond our control. We realise that this can cause distress and inconvenience, but in the event that your surgery is postponed, you will be offered a new date as soon as possible.

## Keeping your appointment

If you cannot keep your appointment, please change it by phoning the number on your appointment letter. Your call will give someone else the chance to be seen and will help us keep waiting times to a minimum.

## Public Transport and Travel Information

Bus details available from:

Lothian Buses on 0131 555 6363 [www.lothianbuses.co.uk](http://www.lothianbuses.co.uk)

Traveline Scotland on 08712002233 or [www.travelinescotland.com](http://www.travelinescotland.com)

Train details available from:

National Rail Enquiries on 03457 484 950 or [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

**Getting to hospital** – <https://children.nhslothian.scot/the-rhcyp/travel-transport/>



## Patient Transport

Patient Transport will only be made available if you have a medical/clinical need. Telephone **0300 123 1236** \*calls charged at local rate up to 28 days in advance to book, making sure you have your CHI Number available. Hard of hearing or speech impaired? Use text relay: **18001-0300 123 1236\*** (calls charged at local rate). To cancel patient transport, telephone 0800 389 1333 (Freephone 24-hour answer service).

## Interpretation and Translation

Your GP will inform us of any interpreting requirements you have before you come to hospital and we will provide an appropriate interpreter. This information can be made available in additional formats, please let us know of any requirements.

