

Caring for your child in a Hip Spica – Advice for Parents/Guardians

This information leaflet provides information to help you look after the child in your care, when they have a hip spica plaster cast.

What is a Hip Spica?

A hip spica is a special type of cast used to immobilise the hip joints and/or thigh. This type of cast is often used to stabilise and promote healing of a damaged joint or fractured femur.

The hip spica will vary depending on the intended use, but it usually extends from the mid chest or abdomen down to the knee on the affected side. If the problem is on both hips and thighs (such as for Congenital Dislocated Hips), then the cast will extend to both knees. Sometimes a bar (broomstick) may be put between the knees to reinforce the plaster cast. A hole is left in the groin area to allow the child to sit on the toilet or for a nappy to be changed.

Your child will be discharged from hospital when staff are satisfied that she or he has recovered sufficiently from the anaesthetic, and you can cope with caring for your child.

Skin care

The key to preventing skin problems is to ensure that the skin is kept clean and dry. When changing the nappy, wash and dry the skin at the back as well as the front of the nappy area. Ensure that the plastic covering around the edge of the plaster is kept dry, using a towel. If you observe red areas under the plaster cast contact the Children's Community Nurse.

Clothing

For baby girls, dresses are the ideal and can be used for night wear as babygrows will not fit over the plaster cast. For baby boys', clothing that has a fastening along the crutch seam may be used without alterations. Alternatively, clothing may be adapted by either undoing the trouser side seam or crutch seam and sewing on tape fastenings or Velcro.

Nappies

You will need to use nappies that are two sizes bigger than your child normally uses so they can fit over the plaster. You may also find it useful to tuck a smaller nappy into the inside of the hip spica to prevent it becoming wet and dirty.

Car seat

It is your responsibility as parents/carers to ensure that you are able to transfer your child securely in the car. You will need a suitable car seat to take your child home. There is not a car seat on the market made especially for children in plaster casts. Your child may not fit into a car seat with high sides. The best type of car seat for babies is one with low or adjustable sides. You may find that the crutch strap is not long enough, but you may be able to obtain a longer crutch strap from the manufacturers. For toddlers the best type of car seat is the booster type with a removable back. **Remember** that if you alter the car seat in any way it will no longer be covered by the manufacturer's guarantee.

Pram/buggy/wheelchair

Bring your child's own pram or buggy in to hospital so that it can be assessed for suitability. We strongly advise that we look closely at your pram/buggy before considering the need for a double buggy or wheelchair. A double buggy may seem to be the perfect solution, but they are difficult to obtain, get through shop doorways and heavy to manoeuvre onto public transport or into or out of a car boot.

High chair

Your child will not fit into a standard high chair in the plaster cast.

Other equipment

If you have a bean bag you may find this useful to position your child on whilst in the plaster cast but you **must supervise your child at all times**.

Pillows are also useful to help position your child for feeding. At night time your child will be most comfortable in the cot/bed free of pillows with just a rolled up towel or blanket positioned under the legs to keep the feet off the base of the bed or cot.

What happens when the plaster cast is removed?

Generally, children will have their cast removed in clinic, then be allowed to go home.

Handling

For the first few days after the cast is removed it is important to move and handle your child as though they still have the cast on. When lifting, support the lower part of the legs, being careful not to let the legs drop from the knees.

Exercise

You may find that your child is reluctant or frightened to move his/her legs when the plaster cast is removed and this is normal. You should encourage your child to move their lower limbs. Bath time is a good way to begin this with gentle leg movements such as bending and straightening the knees, and gently bringing the legs apart and together. **Do not** force the legs together.

Mobility

It is important not to stand or walk your child too early. Children will tend to pull themselves up when they are ready. You may find that your child will crawl or shuffle on their bottoms first and gradually use the furniture to pull up and walk. **Do not** put your child in a baby walker.

General do's and don'ts

- Do encourage gentle movements
- Do support the lower legs
- **Do not** force your child to stand or walk
- **Do not** force your child's legs together
- **Do not** use a baby walker

Further information

Children's Community Nurses, via Paediatric wards

Kipling ward, Conquest Hospital

Tel: 0300 131 4500

Friston Short Stay Paediatric Ambulatory Unit, Eastbourne DGH

Tel: 0300 131 4500

Casting Departmentroom, Conquest Hospital - Tel: 01424 734860

Casting Department, Eastbourne DGH - Tel: 0300 131 4500 ext 771785

Own GP or Practice Nurse.

If unable to contact any of the above phone NHS Direct: 111.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse, doctor or practitioner.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Elizabeth Vaughan, Ward matron, Friston.

Caroline Stephenson, Kipling Ward Manager

The directorate group that has agreed this patient information leaflet:

Diagnostic, Anaesthetic and Surgery

Next review date: August 2026

Responsible clinician: Mr Guy Selmon, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

© East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust – www.esht.nhs.uk