



Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust

# Looking after your child in a hip spica cast: additional guidance for families from the Occupational Therapy team

A hip spica (pronounced 'spy-kah') is a type of cast used to keep the hip or thigh still. It is most commonly used after hip surgery, but can also be used following surgery or a break to the femur (thighbone). It is a hard shell made of plaster of Paris, fibreglass or polyester. It extends from the trunk of the body down to include one or both legs, with a gap left for toileting. The type of hip spica will be decided by the consultant depending on the type of surgery or treatment needed.

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) will be given to you by the Occupational Therapy team before the operation. Getting ready to look after your child in a hip spica will make it easier to cope after the operation.

You will also be given our general hip spica leaflet, which is available from your Orthopaedic Clinical Nurse Specialist, or Orthopaedic Practitioner. It may include brand names but in many cases, alternatives (including supermarket own brands) will be available. Including brands in this information sheet does not mean that they are recommended by GOSH and alternative products may be available.

## Mobility

An Occupational Therapist (OT) will help you position your child in their buggy or pushchair so you will need to bring this with you the day you are admitted to hospital.

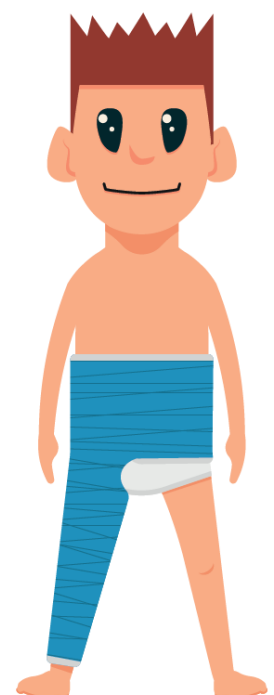
If your child is three years old or more, they may need to borrow a wheelchair from GOSH. We will discuss this with you but please bring your buggy or pushchair (if you have one) with you in any case.

The cast provided for your child post-surgery will hold them in a fixed position which can sometimes make it difficult to position and fit into a buggy.

The diagram below shows some suggestions of what features to look out for in a buggy that will

increase the likelihood that your child might fit into the buggy in the spica.

Please consider the weight limit of the buggy or pushchair as a cast can add approximately 2kgs in weight. The majority of buggies have a weight limit of 15kg so your child may be too heavy to use it safely. In this case, they may need to use a wheelchair.



**Long Straps** – Some pushchairs have extensions that you can buy separately.

**Height adjustable foot rest**  
– The foot rest can be brought up to meet the child's legs in the cast and their feet for support.



**Reclining back** – Children will often be fairly reclined therefore a buggy with reclining back is required.

**Width between bars**  
– The wider the bars the better.

**Side bars set back** – The further back the bars are set, the more likely they are to fit.

Your child will be able to use the buggy to go out and about. Be mindful, however, that the cast must not get wet so you should use a plastic rain cover, or bin bag liner over the cast if going outside in the wet weather.

## Positioning

It is important to change your child's position frequently (every two hours while they are awake) to prevent discomfort and any pressure ulcers developing.

Your child will be able to be positioned in a variety of positions with lots of pillows and blankets to support - we will show you how to do this during your stay.

It is important that the entire cast is supported to evenly distribute the pressure and weight of the cast. Bean bags can be very helpful for positioning on the floor as they will mould to the cast. However we would advise children are not left alone in a bean bag. Please consider general cot safety principals when positioning young babies and children in hip spica casts in bed or bean bags. See the following link for further information: [www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/sleep/cot-safety-features-sleeping-safely-cot](http://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/sleep/cot-safety-features-sleeping-safely-cot)

## Moving and lifting your child

Depending on the size of your child, the OT will discuss different means of moving your child. For babies, you will be able to lift, carry and cuddle your child, ensuring you support the cast in a 'scoop lift'. Where possible, minimise distances needed to carry your child, and use the buggy as

an alternative. This will help protect your back. It is recommended that you do not lift a child over 15kgs. Children aged three years or more may need to use pieces of equipment to move about, such as a transfer board or hoist. This equipment will be arranged prior to your admission. You will work with an OT during admission to ensure you and your child are able to move around safely.

## Toileting

If your child uses nappies or pads, the nursing staff will show you the double nappy technique once your child is in the spica. You will need to buy two different sized nappies – one smaller size to push inside the cast and one larger size to go over the cast. Nappies will need to be changed more frequently to avoid the cast becoming wet or soiled.

If your child is toilet trained, they may need to use a urinal bottle and bed pan. Here are some toileting equipment options:

### Slipper bedpan

This style of bedpan is easier to place under a spica cast than a normal bedpan. They may be available from larger chemists or search online.



### Unisex children's urinal

Happy Pee® is a children's urinal that has an extendable body. This is available from many online stores,.



### Urinals for girls

There are many different types available – again from larger chemists or online.



## Washing

The hip spica cast must not become wet, therefore, it will not be possible for your child to

have a bath. A daily 'top to tail' wipe down with soap and a damp cloth or wet wipes is advised. It may be easier for you to do this with your child lying on a bed with a towel or waterproof protector underneath.

For hair washing, you may be able to lie your baby on the drainage board with their head over the sink but it is safer if two people can do it.

For older children, hair washing can be done by using a hair washing tray placed under your child's head when lying on a bed with a bowl underneath to catch the water. There are many different types available – again from larger chemists or online.



Alternatives are to use dry shampoo or a shampoo cap.

## Clothing

Babies can wear larger-sized baby grows, dresses, t-shirts and stretchy shorts as these should fit over the plaster cast. Some retailers, such as Marks and Spencer, have a special clothing range for hip dysplasia, which may be helpful. It is important to put the clothing over the cast. Tucking clothes into the cast can lead to vomit, food or toys falling into the cast.

Older children should be able to wear their usual clothing but possibly in a larger size. Most dresses should fit easily over the cast. The cast will keep the legs warm, however you may need long socks for the feet, or if one leg is not covered by the cast. Larger T-shirts and loose fitting shorts or trousers may fit. Some cast positions may make it difficult to put shorts on, so you may need modify clothing with Velcro™ or press studs.

The cast will provide a layer of insulation, so it is important not to wear too many layers, particularly in warmer weather.

## Feeding

Your child may not fit into their usual high chair, so you may need to find alternative ways to keep them upright while eating. It is important to sit your child in an upright position to help digestion and swallowing.

You can sometimes keep them upright using a bean bag or their buggy. Small babies may sit on your lap to feed and if you are breast feeding, extra pillows may make this more comfortable for you both. We recommend that you cover the cast with a bib or towel during meal times to avoid soiling of the cast.

Being in a spica cast does not restrict your child from eating the foods they normally would. However, be mindful they do not eat too much as they may become bloated and uncomfortable in the cast. Eating smaller meals more often may help to avoid this.

## Play

It is important to keep things as normal as possible for your child whilst they are in the hip spica cast and have ways of keeping them engaged. Return to your previous routine where able and encourage them to be involved with activities. Pre-plan some quiet sitting activities such as craft, reading, modelling, construction toys, board games, puzzles and so on. Be careful that toys do not fall inside the front of the cast.

Babies can continue to spend time on a mat on the floor to develop their hand, arm and head skills. Children can also lie on their stomach to play, as it encourages use of arms and strengthens their core. We will show you how to safely position your child in these positions.

## Nursery or school

We would advise that your child return to normal routine as much as possible, and therefore if school or nursery are able to look after your child in the cast, returning is recommended. The OT will

discuss this with you in further detail, and can liaise with school/nursery as needed.

## Car seat

Babies and toddlers are unlikely to safely fit in their regular car seat. It is always recommended that your child travel rearward facing if able. We are unable to provide any advice on your specific car seat, however would recommend you contact the In Car Safety Centre for information ([www.incarsafetycentre.co.uk](http://www.incarsafetycentre.co.uk) or call 01908 220

909). The STEPS charity may be able to offer assistance with grants and loans for specialist car seats if suitable.

Before surgery, it will be impossible to accurately predict whether older children will fit into the car following application of the hip spica, as each child is cast in a different position. Alternatively, plan to avoid using the car and use public transport or a pushchair or wheelchair to get out and about.

## Further information and support

Call the Occupational Therapy department on 020 7405 9200 extension 0646 or 7082.

Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm – call the Orthopaedic Practitioner on 020 7405 9200 and ask for extension 6316 or bleep 0304. You can also call the Orthopaedic Clinical Nurse Specialists on 020 7813 8132 or 020 7782 7904.

Out of hours, call Sky Ward on 020 7829 8807 or 020 7829 8806. If you are very concerned, take your child to the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

Steps Charity – for anyone affected by a lower limb problem – [www.steps-charity.org.uk](http://www.steps-charity.org.uk) – have lots of information about coping with a hip spica including helpful videos:

- Hip spica care – babies and toddlers toileting – [www.youtu.be/LzrfP3FQW6M](http://www.youtu.be/LzrfP3FQW6M)
- Hip spica care – older children toileting – [www.youtu.be/refLCcD\\_tTs](http://www.youtu.be/refLCcD_tTs)