

Warm weather spikes increase in broken homes, itchy casts

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Spring weather signals the start of many outdoor activities as people of all ages eagerly embrace the change in weather. Paul Prinz, MD, orthopaedic surgeon at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, part of Loyola University Health System says, "Broken bones and fractures occur year-round, but the change in seasons always creates an increase of patients in our offices."

Some 6.8 million [broken bones](#) and [fractures](#) are reported each year in the United States. In part, the number is growing due to an older, more active population of "baby boomers."

"A cast is still the most common treatment for healing bones, and complaints about itching are among the most common," Dr. Prinz said.

Accidents happen and bones get broken, but Dr. Prinz said that maintaining good health practices while healing in a cast is especially important. "Never stick anything into your cast to scratch an itch. Never. I have had to remove casts to retrieve items ranging from pencils and chopsticks to forks and brushes," he said.

Dr. Prinz is no longer surprised when he removes casts and finds objects. "The bone may be safely healed but scratching techniques can cause skin infections and blood conditions that require additional medical care," he said. "The skin is very delicate and sensitive when it is protected by a cast and is very easy to injure. Objects can create wounds, which may lead to infection. The use of lead pencils can even cause blood

poisoning," Dr. Prinz warned. He also said that healing skin wounds will increase the itch factor.

Tips for Itch Relief

Dr. Prinz advises patients to keep the cast clean and dry, and often uses a waterproof cast to prevent irritation. Here are Dr. Prinz's top tips for comfort when you sport a cast:

1. "Gently use a hair dryer, set on a low and cool setting, to blow air between the cast and skin. Don't use a warm setting as it may create moisture through condensation."
2. "Lightly tap on cast to create a gentle vibration."
3. "Massage the exposed skin around the cast and increase circulation through massage in other areas of the body."
4. "Wrap a watertight ice pack or even a sealed bag of frozen vegetables on the exterior of the cast to cool down the area."
5. "Consult your physician and ask if an over-the-counter antihistamine can be safely used to minimize the itching."

It is not unusual for a cast to smell. "Talk to your physician about your concerns," Dr. Prinz said. "Keep the cast dry and as clean as possible. The warm-up in weather makes everyone want to get outdoors and get active, even when wearing a cast, but you'll heal faster and more comfortably if you slow down and take it easy."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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