

Braces for Your Back

Overview

Your doctor may prescribe a brace for you to wear after a spinal injury or surgery. It will immobilize your spine while you heal and will control pain by restricting your movement.

A medical professional will help provide you with the type of brace that is the most appropriate and comfortable for you. This will maximize your benefit from the brace and enable you to use it with few adjustments.

Types of back braces

Back braces can be flexible, rigid, or custom molded.

Flexible braces are made from an elastic cotton/nylon material and are most commonly used to support your back when lifting, to improve posture, or to relieve low back pain. This type of brace is similar to a girdle or corset.

Rigid braces contain some flexible material with some hard plastic inserts and/or metal bars that add additional support and stability.

Custom-molded braces are made from molded plastic in two pieces—a front and back piece—that fasten together. This type of brace is used to immobilize your spine during recovery from a fracture, spinal surgery, or correction of scoliosis. To be fitted for this type of brace, a plaster cast is made of your torso by an orthotist. A rigid plastic brace is then custom-molded from the cast to fit your body comfortably and exactly.



flexible brace

rigid brace

custom
molded brace

Common rigid and custom-molded back braces include the **thoracic-lumbar-sacral brace (TLSO)**, which supports the upper back, low back, and sacrum, and the **lumbar-sacral brace, (LSO)**, which supports the low back and sacrum. Instructions for putting on and removing these types of braces can be viewed by clicking on these links: [TLSO](#), [TLSO with sternal piece](#), and [LSO](#).

When to wear your brace

It is important to follow your doctor's specific instructions for when and how to wear your brace – especially when sleeping, showering, and engaging in certain activities.

Learn how to wear your brace during your fitting for the brace. You will wear the brace after surgery until your spine has healed or fused, a period that can range from 4 weeks to 6 months. If you are fitted for your brace prior to surgery, practice taking it on and off to increase your familiarity with it. Do not discontinue wearing the brace until your doctor has instructed you to do so.

Brace care

To clean your brace, wipe it with a mild soap and damp cloth every day. If your brace has padded liners, allow it to air dry or use a hair dryer on the cool setting. Do not place your brace or the pads in a clothes dryer.

Activity

Your brace will restrict your ability to move. You will not be able to see your feet, so take care when walking. Avoid steps and curbs until you are comfortable. When moving from a lying to a standing position, use your arm and leg muscles to keep your spine in proper alignment and “log” roll. Follow your physician's or physical therapist's instructions about exercise.

Showering / skin care

You may remove the brace to shower or sleep unless your surgeon states otherwise. Watch for reddened or irritated skin under the brace. Someone should check areas you cannot see. Skin breakdown may indicate that the brace does not fit properly.

Icing while wearing your brace

You may apply ice while wearing the brace. Place a cold pack inside a pillow case and place it over the area where you are experiencing pain. Place the brace over the top of the cold pack.

Custom molded braces

- You should first be fitted for a fabricated back brace 3 to 4 weeks before surgery.
 - It is recommended that you pick up your brace and practice wearing it 2 weeks before your surgery.
 - While sitting on the edge of the bed, put the brace on and take it off without twisting or turning.
 - Go to the bathroom and clean yourself with the brace on. If you find this difficult, assistive devices are available and can help.
- Never wear the back brace directly against bare skin.
 - You may take the brace off while you sleep and while you shower.
 - When the brace is worn correctly, the front should overlap the back.
 - Clean the brace with either rubbing alcohol or soap and water. The brace is waterproof and can be rinsed off. DO NOT submerge the brace in water.
 - Painful pressure over the incision can be alleviated by placing 2 maxi pads on the inside of the brace on either side of the incision. This will create an open space over the incision and will prevent rubbing.



custom molded brace

Brace weaning tips

- **Start on the date recommended by your surgeon.**
- Start slowly. Remove the brace for 1 hour each morning and evening. Wear the brace during the most active parts of the day.
- Add 30 to 60 brace-free minutes to each morning and evening session every day as tolerated. At this pace, it should take you 1 to 2 weeks to wean completely.
- Expect some increase in pain through the weaning process.
- Use ice as instructed.

Sources & links

If you have more questions, please contact Mayfield Brain & Spine at 800-325-7787 or 513-221-1100.

Glossary

cervical: the neck portion of the spine made up of seven vertebrae.

lumbar: lower portion of the spine made up of 5 vertebrae; connects with the fused bones of the sacrum below.

orthotic: another name for a brace

orthotist: a medical professional who specializes in making custom molded braces.

sacral: the five vertebrae at the base of the spine that provide attachment for the iliac (hip) bones and protect the pelvic organs.

thoracic: the middle portion of the spine made up of 12 vertebrae.



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