

Elbow Injury - Minor

Definition

- A minor injury to the elbow.
- Your child can use the elbow, but with some pain.

Health Information

Types of Elbow Injuries

- **Sprain.** Stretched or torn ligaments.
- **Strain.** Stretched or torn muscle (a "pulled muscle").
- **Muscle bruise.** From a direct impact.
- **Bone bruise.** From a direct impact.
- **Broken bones (fractures) and bones out of joint (dislocations).** These injuries are more serious and need to be seen by a doctor. They are not covered in this handout.

Symptoms

- Pain is the main symptom.
- Moving the elbow worsens the pain.
- Swelling is also common in the first few days.

Causes

- Falling onto the hand or directly onto the elbow often causes elbow injuries.
- Pulling a young child too hard by the hand or wrist can dislocate the elbow.
- Overstretching or excessive exercise can cause sprains and strains.
- Being struck while playing sports can also cause elbow injuries.

Care Advice

1. Key Points

- Bruised bones or muscles can be treated at home.
- Most sprains and strains can also be treated at home.
- Here is some home care advice that should help.

2. Cold for Pain During First 48 Hours

- To help initial pain and swelling, use a cold pack. You can also use ice in a plastic bag or wrapped in a wet cloth.
- Put ice on the elbow for 20 minutes. Repeat every hour for the first 4 hours. Then use it only as needed for the first 2 days.
- Caution: avoid frostbite.

3. Heat for Pain After 48 Hours

- If pain lasts more than 2 days, put heat on the sore area.
- Use a heat pack, heating pad or warm wet washcloth.
- Do this for 10 minutes, as needed. Reason: increases blood flow and speeds healing.
- Caution: avoid burns.

4. **Pain Medicine**

- For pain relief, give acetaminophen every 4 hours or ibuprofen every 6 hours as needed (See Dosage table).
- Ibuprofen may be more effective for this type of pain.

5. **Activity and Movement During Recovery**

- Rest the elbow for the first 48 hours. Wear a sling if that helps.
- After the first 48 hours, start moving the elbow. Reason: this helps prevent tight muscles and joints.
- As pain improves, gradually increase activity. Allow any activity that does not cause pain.
- Here's a good rule: if it hurts, don't do it.

6. **What to Expect**

- Pain and swelling most often peak 2 or 3 days after injury.
- Swelling is most often gone in a week.
- Pain may take 2 weeks to go away completely.
- Protect the area from further injury until healed.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child cannot move the elbow
- Pain doesn't improve after 3 days
- Pain lasts more than 2 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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