

The elbow usually gets better by itself with this treatment. If you have any concerns that your child's arm has not recovered within two to three days you should return to the MIU for a further examination.

Prevention

To prevent this happening it is best to avoid swinging games and pulling or lifting your child up by the hand.

Remember to teach others relatives or carers to do the same.

For further advice please contact:

Abingdon MIU	01865 903 476
Henley MIU	01865 903 755
Witney MIU	01865 903 841
Wallingford FAU	01865 903 471
Bicester FAU	01865 903 976

MIU: minor injury unit
FAU: first aid unit

Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on freephone 0800 328 7971.

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

Nëse ky informacion ju nevojitet në një gjuhë apo format tjetër, ju lutem na kontaktoni

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若您需要本信息的另一种语言或格式的版本，请与我们联系

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اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی دوسری زبان میں یا کسی دوسرے طریقے سے درکار ہیں تو براہ کرم ہمیں پوچھیں۔۔۔

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This service is part of our Older People Directorate.

OP 121.15



Urgent care

Pulled elbow
(radial head
subluxation)

What is a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow is a common minor injury which usually affects children under the age of five years. It occurs when the radius partially slips out of a ring shaped ligament at the elbow. This ligament holds the elbow in position next to the ulna. Medically, this is known as radial head subluxation.

What causes a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow happens because young children's joints are not completely developed and the ring shaped ligament is looser at this age. Any sudden pulling, stretching, jerking or swinging of the arm may cause the radius to slip. This is commonly done by:

- you and your child moving in opposite directions quickly while holding hands
- lifting or pulling your child with one hand, perhaps when jumping puddles
- pulling an arm through a sleeve while dressing

What are the symptoms?

Your child may initially cry, appear to be in pain and be unable to fully bend their elbow.

Sometimes there is a cracking or popping sound. Your child may be reluctant to use their arm, which may hang loosely at their side. Often they are not distressed until you try to move the arm, but may occasionally seem surprisingly upset by what seems a very minor event.

How is it diagnosed?

Telling the story of how it occurred and an examination of your child's arm will help us diagnose a pulled elbow.

An X-ray is not normally necessary because the ligament will not show up and when we examine your child, we will be able to tell if there is a more serious injury or break to the arm.

How is it treated?

If your child seems to be in pain they should be given simple painkillers such as paracetamol.

Once the examination has shown no other injury, your child's arm will need to be moved in a particular way to manipulate the head of the radius bone back into the correct position.

This is a quick and simple manoeuvre, but may cause a brief moment of discomfort. Often a click is felt as the bone slips back into position. Shortly after this your child should be able to start using their arm, especially if distracted by playing with a toy, but sometimes this can take a few hours or more.

The longer the arm has been 'subluxed' the longer this is likely to take, but every child is different.

We usually advise observation in the minor injury unit (MIU) until your child has started to use their arm, but this decision will be discussed with you at the time. Some children are more likely to relax and start to use it once they have gone home.

What happens next?

Your child is expected to make a full recovery within a few days. If the manipulation is immediately successful we will not arrange to see your child again.

If we think it is likely there might be another injury, or the treatment is not successful, it is possible that an X-ray will be performed. If the X-ray is also normal the treatment will then be to rest your child's arm in a sling for 2-3 days.