

# Treating your child's pulled elbow

Children's Emergency Department

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## What is a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow can occur in young children as their joints are not yet fully developed. The ring shaped ligament that holds the elbow steady is a lot looser at this age. This means that the ligament can slip causing pain and your child will stop using their arm fully.

A pulled elbow can happen when there is any sudden pulling, stretching or jerking of the arm. In a smaller child it can even happen when they roll over on their arm.

## How do you know when it's a pulled elbow?

Your child might not be able to straighten or bend their arm, and will often be in pain if you try to move it. They will probably not want to use their arm. There is usually a clear story of the arm being pulled.

The healthcare professional will have a good look at the arm, and if there is no pain to the bones, it will often be a pulled elbow.

## Does it need an X-ray?

It is not possible to see a pulled elbow on an X-ray, but if there is not a clear story to indicate a pulled elbow, your child might need an X-ray to check that there is no other injury. This is because pulled elbows are treated by movement, and moving a broken elbow would be very painful, and could cause further damage.

## How are pulled elbows treated?

A nurse or doctor will quickly move the arm back into its normal position and the ligament slips into place. It will briefly hurt at the time but most children will feel back to normal in a few minutes.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

Some children take a little longer and we will observe them in the department until they feel better and back to normal.

Hospital staff will arrange for your child to have pain relief if needed.

## Can it happen again?

It can happen again and so to prevent it you should:

- avoid any sudden pulling to the arms.
- lift your child up under their armpits or around their body.
- avoid games that swing or pull your child by the arms
- advise your nursery or school and relatives about this.

If it does happen again, give simple painkillers and come to the Children's Emergency Department.

## Is there anything else I need to know?

This is a very common injury that will not give your child any long-term problems.

After being treated for a pulled elbow, we would expect your child to return to using their arm normally. Please come back to the Children's Emergency Department for further review if:

- your child's pain does not go away despite giving pain relief.
- your child is distressed and the pain seems to be getting worse.

## Contact details

If you have any concerns you can contact the NHS helpline on 111 for advice.

## Giving us your feedback

We would love to get some feedback on your visit today. Use your smart phone to scan this QR code for quick access to our online feedback survey form.

Alternatively, you can access the feedback form from our website:

<https://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/patients/thinking-of-choosing-us/patient-experience/>



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