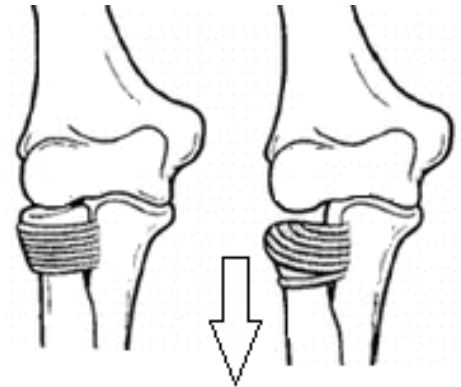


Pulled elbow

A pulled elbow is a common, minor injury. It usually affects children under 5 years old.

Your child's forearm has two bones, the radius and the ulna.

The radius is held in place at the elbow joint by a ring of ligament (stretchy tissue). In children under 5, this ligament is still developing and if it is overstretched, the radius can slip out of its normal position. This is called radial head subluxation.



A pulled elbow happens when a child's arm is pulled, stretched or jerked. For example, when they suddenly move in a different direction to you when you are holding hands, by lifting them up by the wrists, swinging them by the arms, or pulling their arm through clothing sleeves.

When an elbow is pulled, your child might cry at first then hold the arm against the body, and will not use it. They will become upset when you try to touch or move it.

Diagnosis and treatment

A pulled elbow is easily diagnosed from a description of the injury and examination of the arm. It will not show up on an X-ray. However, if there is any uncertainty of the injury, an X-ray can be taken.

The nurse or doctor looking after your child will gently manipulate the arm to allow the radius to pop back into place. This is uncomfortable and can be distressing for your child, but it is over very quickly. Your child will usually be observed in the department until they are using their arm again fully.

Preventing a pulled elbow

To prevent a pulled elbow, avoid pulling your child up by the hands or swinging them by the wrists. Teach other people who care for your child not to do this as well. Instead, lift them up under their arms.

Some children are more likely to have a pulled elbow, and it can happen more than once. It does not cause any long-term damage. By about 5 years old, the elbow ligaments have strengthened enough that a pulled elbow is rare after this age.

When to get help

If you think your child has a pulled elbow, give them painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, and get medical attention. The sooner it can be manipulated, the easier it is. If your child has been allowed to go home after manipulation of a pulled elbow but they still appear in pain or are not using their arm as usual, speak to your GP or come back to the Emergency Department (A&E).

NHS 111

NHS 111 is a telephone service that offers support and advice 24 hours a day. Please call 111 if you have concerns about your child's health. A fully trained advisor will be able to direct you to appropriate resources or services.

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **tel:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm, **email:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch, **tel:** 020 7188 8815, **email:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web:** www.nhs.uk

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