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Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital
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Pulled elbow ***(Radial head subluxation)***

Information for
children, parents and carers



Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital

Contact telephone number

If you think that the injury has happened again at any time, attend your nearest Emergency Department

If your child still has significant pain after 24 hours, please contact the Emergency Department for a review appointment.

**Emergency Department
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital**

☎ 01224 552041 ☎

What is a pulled elbow?

Your child has been diagnosed with a pulled elbow (the medical name for this condition is radial head subluxation). This is a common injury in young children up to the age of 6 and is most common in children aged 2 to 4 years.

One of the bones in the elbow (called the radius) has slipped off its normal position and is perched on its supporting ligament (the tissue that attaches bones to other bones).

The elbow is not dislocated, but your child will be holding their arm at the side and will not be keen to move it.

How did it happen?

A pulling force (usually very minor) has been applied to the elbow when it was straight. Sometimes there is no specific history but common reasons include:

- swinging your child by their arms
- a child trips while holding hands
- pulling an arm through a sleeve

What does this mean?

Pulled elbows aren't serious injuries but can be distressing.

If left with no treatment, they almost all resolve within 2 days. However, we would want to limit the period of discomfort by offering your child treatment.

How is it treated?

Most children don't need an X-ray as the doctor or nurse can usually identify a pulled elbow by examination alone.

Once the diagnosis is made, the doctor or nurse will explain to you a simple procedure to reposition the bone.

You'll be asked to sit your child on your lap facing the doctor or nurse. They will gently hold the affected arm and gently twist and/or bend the elbow.

This may cause some discomfort, but it usually only lasts a few seconds. After the procedure, children are observed for a short time to make sure that they're using their arm normally.

What if this doesn't work?

In a very small number of children, the procedure might not work. In this situation, staff will discuss with you the possibility of trying the procedure again.

In the unlikely situation that it doesn't work the second time, your child will be given a sling and a review clinic appointment for 1 to 2 days' time.

Your child may need simple pain relief, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen for up to 24 hours.

How do I avoid a pulled elbow from happening again?

- Unfortunately, having happened once, there is an increased risk of it happening again although there are no associated long term complications.
- Avoid actions that "pull" the arm straight such as lifting or swinging by the hands.
- Children grow out of this condition by the age of 6.