



Little League Elbow

Children who play baseball—especially pitchers—can develop elbow pain from repeatedly throwing the ball. People call this “Little League Elbow.” But other kinds of activities can also be the cause. Playing tennis, playing video games a lot, or even using a screwdriver can all cause this kind of pain. Repetitive motion is the culprit. Regular warm-ups and stretching may help prevent Little League Elbow.

Little League Elbow can be mild or severe, depending on the child and the kind of injury. In some, it's a strain to the muscles or ligaments around the elbow. Less often, it may be a bone injury. When children are still growing, there are softer portions of the bone near the ends that are called “growth plates.” These can actually be damaged and torn, and the injured bone can be seen on an X-ray.

Like adults, children should warm up before they engage in a sport or physical activity, and they should stretch after they're through playing. Coaches should be careful not to place too much pressure on growing children to throw hard or to throw for too long. For example, pitchers should not pitch more than 6 innings a week, and should have at least 3 days rest between pitching efforts.

Treating elbow pain

Now, let's talk about treating a painful elbow in a child. You should treat Little League Elbow by applying ice for 10 minutes each hour during the first 3 days. After that, you should perform the same treatment for 15 to 20 minutes, 3 times a day. You can also massage your child's arm. Be sure to have him or her rest it. Over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen may help reduce the pain and swelling. (Don't give aspirin to children or teens younger than 20, however.)

The most important treatment is complete rest. Your child should stop using the affected arm for as long as it takes for the pain to go away. Tell your child, “If it hurts you to do something, don't keep doing it!” Continuing to use the arm while ignoring the pain can lead to further injury and even cause permanent damage to the bones of the elbow.

In most cases, the pain and discomfort of Little League elbow will fade over time. Depending on the amount of injury, this may take from a few days to a few months.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Call your child's doctor if:

- Symptoms of Little League Elbow last for more than 2 weeks of rest.
- You've treated the pain with ice and pain medicine, and it still persists.
- Your child has a fever, rapid swelling, redness, or cannot use the elbow.

Your medical professional will probably be able to diagnose Little League Elbow without an X-ray, but may order an X-ray in some cases to rule out other complications. In severe cases of Little League Elbow, there can be evidence of bone injury.

When the time comes to resume sports activity, it is important to remember to go slowly. Balls should be thrown, bats should be swung, and tennis rackets should be used—gently. Advise your child to avoid pain by going slowly to gradually build up strength and muscle conditioning.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.