

Emergency Department

# Elbow injury in children (fat pad sign)

Information for parents and carers



When a child injures their elbow (for example during a fall) they may have pain when it is touched or moved, and swelling of their elbow. When they have an X-ray, sometimes there is no obvious sign of a break to the bone, but there are signs that there is some damage. This is usually noted as a 'fat pad sign' being seen on the X-ray.

## What is a 'fat pad sign'?

A fat pad sign is when the normal pad of fat that sits around the bones in the elbow becomes raised up. This is usually due to swelling in that part of the elbow. This can be caused by damage to the ligaments in the elbow, or sometimes by a small fracture (break) to one of the elbow bones that can't be seen on an X-ray. The reason it can't be seen is that the broken bone is not out of place. This is a common finding on elbow X-rays.

## Treatment over the first seven days

These injuries almost always heal well with time and no specific treatment is required.

Your child's injured elbow will be held in a comfortable position using a collar and cuff or sling. They will need to wear this for the next seven days. Their arm can be taken out of the collar and cuff or sling for bathing or showering without risk to the injury.

If you remove the collar and cuff or sling before the end of seven days and your child appears to be comfortable and can move their arm freely, then there is no reason for them to carry on wearing the collar and cuff or sling.

It is best to avoid sports and rough and tumble play when wearing the collar and cuff or sling.

## Pain relief

It is important that your child takes the correct doses of pain relief (paracetamol and/or ibuprofen are ideal), to help with the pain, as it will still be sore for a short period even when they are wearing the collar and cuff or sling.

## Treatment after seven days

When your child was treated, you will have been given an appointment for a review of their injury in one week's time. The Trauma Consultants will check on your child's progress and if there are on going problems they can be addressed at this early stage.

The reason to wait for a week is that when children are seen the next day they are often still in too much pain to allow a full review of their elbow.

This appointment will be at the John Radcliffe New Patient (Fracture) Clinic or the Horton General Hospital Fracture Clinic, if you are in the Banbury area. It is important to keep this appointment, even if your child's injury seems to be better.

## Feedback

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

### **John Radcliffe Hospital**

PALS Office  
Level 2, Main entrance  
John Radcliffe Hospital  
Headley Way  
Headington  
Oxford, OX3 9DU

Tel: 01865 221 473

Email: [PALS@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@ouh.nhs.uk)

### **Horton General Hospital**

PALS Office  
Horton General Hospital  
Oxford Road  
Banbury, OX16 9AL

Tel: 01295 229 259

Email: [PALS@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@ouh.nhs.uk)

## How to contact us

If your child continues to have pain 8 weeks after their injury, despite taking regular painkillers and caring for their injury as advised, or if at any point you are worried their injury is not healing, please contact the **New Patient Clinic** for an appointment.

New Patient (Fracture) Clinic at:

**John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford**

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm

Saturday and Sunday 9.00am to 11.00am

Tel: **01865 220 217**

OR

**Horton General Hospital, Banbury**

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 11.00am

Tel: **01295 229 606**



If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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