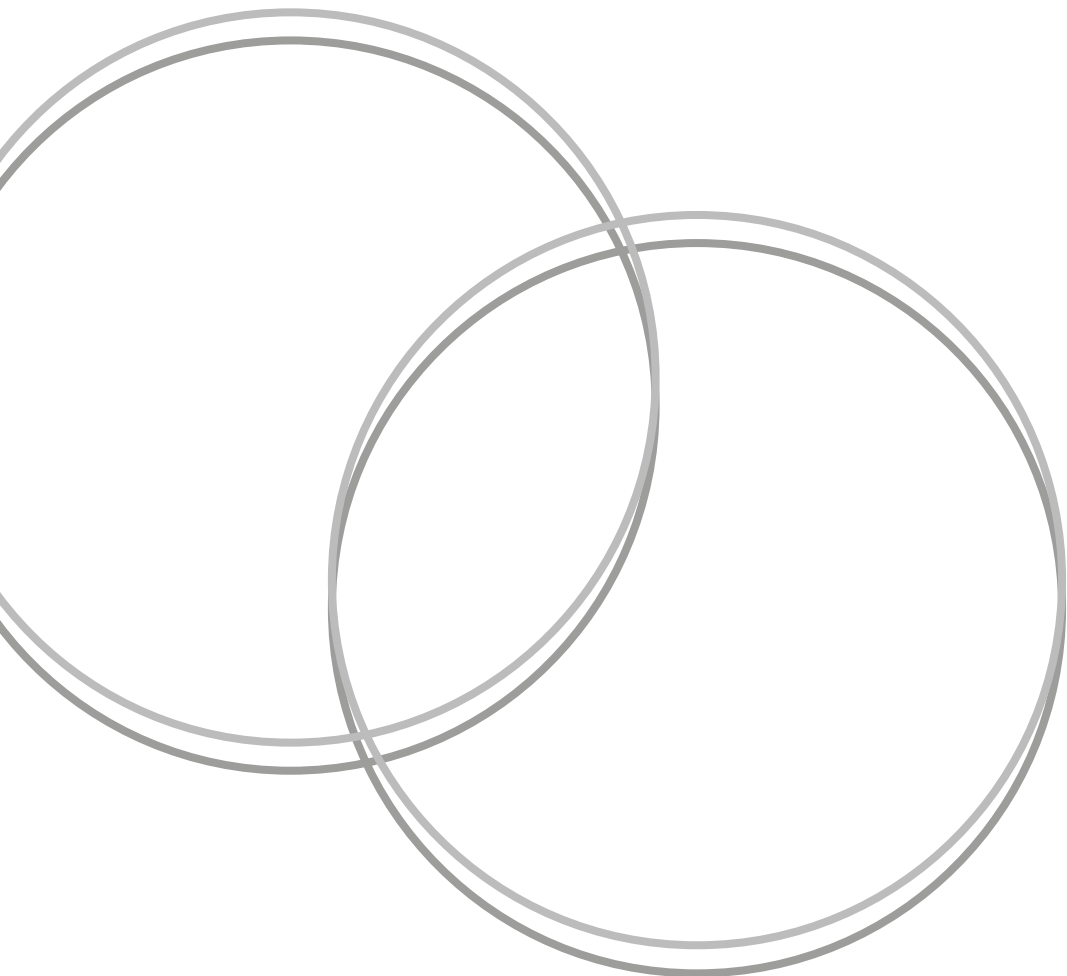




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Pulled Elbow in Children

Information for Parents / Carers



What is a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow is a common injury in young children. It occurs when one of the forearm bones, called the radius, partially slips out of a ring-shaped ligament at the elbow, because young children's elbow joints are not fully developed.

This injury often happens when a child's arm is pulled, twisted or stretched. It can also happen when young children swing using their arms or even from a simple fall. Children will stop using the affected arm and often prefer to leave it hanging by their side. After the injury, children may not appear in pain until they try to bend or move their arm at the elbow.

How is a pulled elbow diagnosed?

The description of how the injury happened and an examination of your child's arm will help to diagnose a pulled elbow. An X-ray image is not normally required, because we only X-ray children if we suspect a broken bone or dislocation.

How is a pulled elbow treated?

Your child can be given medicines such as paracetamol or ibuprofen if they are in pain. Their arm will need to be moved in a particular way to attempt manipulation or movement of the bone back to the correct position. This is a quick and simple procedure but may cause a brief moment of discomfort. Shortly after this procedure your child should start using their arm again. We usually advise observation in the Children's Emergency Department until your child has started to use their arm again before going home. Occasionally a child can be reluctant to move their arm after this procedure. They may still be discharged home, but if your child is still not using their arm after 2 days, you should return to the Emergency Department.

What should I do if my child is still in pain?

A child who has had a pulled elbow relocated should not be in too much pain or discomfort, but you can give medicines such as paracetamol or ibuprofen if your child is in pain. If their pain is not resolving or they are not using their arm fully after one or two days following the injury, please bring your child back to the Children's Emergency Department.

Will this injury happen again?

The injury does not cause any long-term damage, but it can happen again. If you think it has happened again, bring your child back to the Emergency Department, please do not attempt to manage this yourself. As children grow, their elbow joints become stronger, and this injury is less common in children over five years old. To try and prevent this injury from happening again:

- Avoid lifting or pulling your child by the hands, wrists or forearms
- Avoid swinging your child around by the wrists or forearms
- Use upper arms or holding under the armpits to lift your child
- Remove tight clothes carefully when helping children and try not to pull their arms.

If you have any other concerns or require further advice, please telephone NHS 111.

Further Information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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