Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Simple Elbow Injury

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Simple Elbow Injury

Patient Information

Musculoskeletal (MSK) Therapy Service, Trauma and Orthopaedics

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Injury to the Elbow

Injuries to the elbow are common. A clinician has reviewed the injury (and any x-rays). You / your child have injured some of the soft tissues (skin, muscles, ligaments, capsule surrounding the joint) and / or may have a small break in the bone that cannot be seen on X-Ray.

These injuries can result in a painful, stiff elbow, sometimes with swelling or bruising, but it should improve without any follow-up needed. It can however take up to 6 weeks or more for full function to return.

Warning!

Elbows become stiff very quickly. This injury is safe to exercise and if slings are worn or movement of the elbow is not attempted early on, then the risk of elbow stiffness is high.

Slings

If a sling has been provided, this should be removed for exercise. A sling is for early support and should not be used for longer than needed (approximately 2 weeks). It may be useful when outside in public but try to remove it as soon as possible.

Exercise Advice

It is very important to keep the elbow mobile, and to slowly increase movement. We have included some exercises to help. You should do the exercises several times per day. It helps to watch the elbow crease (line on the front of the elbow). When elbows are sore or stiff, the shoulder or wrist often moves instead of the elbow; by watching the crease, you can make sure it is the elbow that is moving.

You should be guided by your symptoms. Rest your elbow when it is sore and use it for light function as comfortable.

General Advice

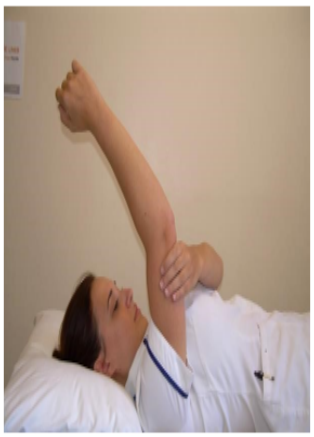
You can use over the counter painkillers e.g. paracetamol and or ibuprofen to ease any discomfort, and to help you return to normal function.

Some patients find that ice packs help with the pain and swelling. You should only apply an ice pack to skin if the skin has normal sensation, and the skin is not broken, damaged or cut. Always place a damp towel on your skin under the ice pack and check the skin regularly for signs of ice burn, such as excessive redness, other change in the skin's colour, or blistering. Apply for no longer than 15-20 minutes.

A single layer of elastic sleeve bandage, e.g. Tubigrip® may help support your elbow, but this is not always needed. This should not be tight. It should be used only during the day. It should be removed if any fingers change colour or have altered sensation.

Exercises

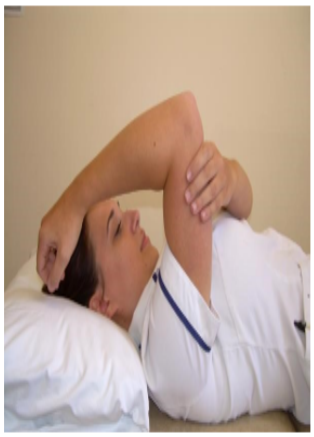
Overhead Extension



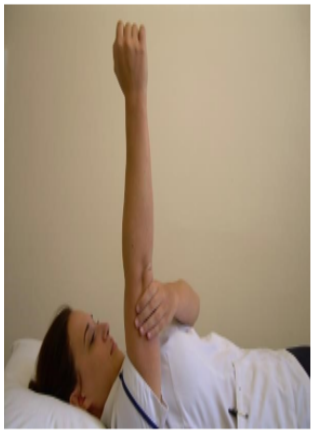
Lie on your back.

Raise your arm up so that your upper arm is pointing up towards the ceiling.

Hold it in position with your other hand (see picture).

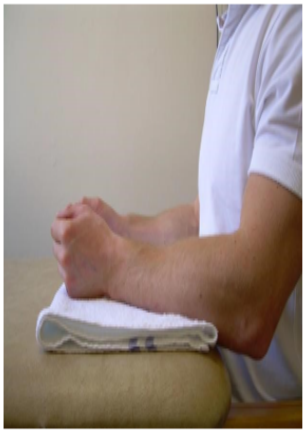


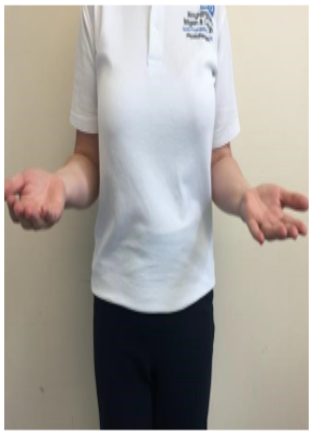
Keeping your upper arm still, slowly relax your elbow, so that it bends, and your hand moves towards your head.

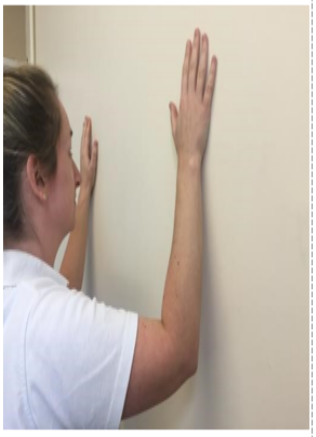
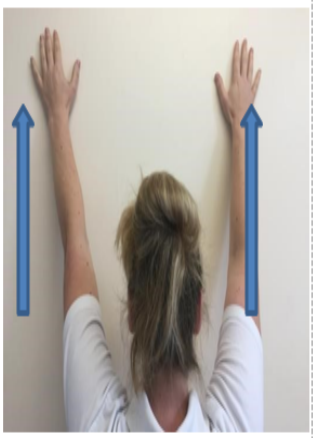


Keeping your upper arm still, slowly straighten your elbow, so that your hand points towards the ceiling.

Repeat this exercise frequently throughout the day. It should not cause pain. You may feel that the exercise eases any discomfort that you have. Ideally you should exercise your elbow every 1-2 hours.

Table Slides	
	Sit at a table or stand at the kitchen work-top. Rest your hands on a towel (with your palms facing inwards).
	Watching your elbow crease, slide the towel forwards with both hands. Only go forwards whilst your elbow is moving. Pause.
	Return by sliding your elbows and hands back, watching the crease. As you feel more comfortable, as you pull your elbows back towards you, you can lean your body forwards over your elbows. This will help them bend further.

Rotation Exercise	
	Stand with your elbows flexed and tucked into your side, hands in front.
	Slowly rotate both palms to face up. Slowly rotate both palms to face down.

Wall Slides	
	Stand close to a wall, facing the wall. Place both hands on the wall. You can use a towel if this is easier.
	Slowly slide the hands/towel up the wall. Only slide when your elbow crease is moving. Once your elbow crease stops moving, pause and raise your heels up to stand on your tip toes – as if you were trying to reach something from a high shelf. Pause and then lower your heels.
	Slide your hands down by tucking in your elbows. You can gain more elbow bend by standing closer to the wall as your arms lower.

Further advice

Get in touch with the fracture clinic if:

- there is any locking (elbow getting stuck in one position)

- there is ongoing wobbliness or clumsiness
- there is any numbness or tingling after 1 week
- pain persists or gets worse despite taking pain killers
- the wound becomes increasingly red, hot, painful, or discharge is visible

You should return to normal function by 6 weeks after your injury, though some people may take longer, and children are often quicker to heal.

If your symptoms are not improving or you have any concerns, please contact:

Fracture Clinic Physiotherapy Team: 01942 822103

Fracture Clinic: 01942 822595

Adult MSK Physiotherapy Self-Referral

If you are over 16, you can also now self-refer into Physiotherapy by ringing any of the departments below:

Boston House Health Centre Telephone 01942 482260

Leigh Infirmary Telephone 01942 483413

Platt Bridge Health Centre Telephone 01942 482403

A referral form can also be found on this webpage:

https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/adult-msk-physiotherapy-self-referral

Please scan the QR Code to access the website.



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