

Orthopaedic Connection

The Elbow's Connected to the Arm Bone...

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Here we go moving back up the arm, I mean *upper extremity*, to the elbow. We are leaving the complicated, intricate structure of the hand and wrist (27 bones, you do have that in your notes I hope).

The elbow consists of three bones. They are the upper arm bone called the humerus and the two forearm bones called the radius and the ulna. Every one knows the elbow is a hinge, but it also has everything to do with rotation of the forearm, which is extremely important. When injured the elbow is unforgiving and often will lose considerable motion in bending, but also in rotating the forearm so the palm can go up or down.

What things can go wrong with the elbow you ask? Plenty.

Fractures and Dislocations

Falling on the elbow or outstretched hand can do great damage in an instant.

A dislocated elbow is extremely painful and always ends up in the ER for treatment, that is reduction and splinting.

A common elbow fracture is a fracture of the radial head, which is a small circular structure that has to do with rotation. Mostly it can be treated without surgery.

Nursemaid elbow is a dislocation of the radial head in a child whose parent or baby sitter jerked on the child's arm. Arm jerked, pain, child refuses to use the arm, parent feels guilty, ER here we come.

There are many combinations of major fractures about the elbow that are nasty and usually require surgery. We frequently need to use pins, plates and screws etc. to repair these fractures because they don't heal properly just in a cast. The fracture moves in the cast and loses position all too often.

Let's play Jeopardy.

* The painful tendon inflammation condition on the outer aspect of the elbow. *What is tennis elbow?*

Where did the name come from? Too much tennis apparently. Actually anyone can get it. It is very painful and always on the outer aspect of the elbow.

Treatment: Medication, elastic velcro brace, Theragesic, injection, physical therapy, rarely surgery. Big menu. Can be really stubborn to get rid of it.

* Large knob like swelling on back of the elbow. *What is olecranon bursitis?*

A swelling over the tip of the elbow caused by inflammation of the tissue bursa. The bursa can be fluid filled and very large, but not too painful. If it is swollen and lumpy it can cause more pain.

Treatment: Aspirate all the fluid and inject anti-inflammatory medication. Wrap with an ace bandage. If you are lucky it then goes away. It often becomes lumpy and thick and tender and requires removal.

* Little pieces in the elbow joint the size of rice or small beans. *What is a loose body?*

The elbow is notorious for developing bone or cartilage pieces in the joint that come loose from the joint surface and float around in the joint. They are usually the result of injury and are rampant in baseball pitchers.

Treatment: They often require arthroscopic surgery or limited open surgery to remove them and clean up the joint.

Well, time's up for this class. To be continued next week. Much more interesting information about the elbow is coming.

For you eager beavers who want to get ahead of the class, check out www.orthopodsurgeon.com /Your Orthopaedic Connection for much more information about the elbow. Be sure to come back next week.

Be well.

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