

Orthopaedic Connection

Elbow Jeopardy, Continued

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It's time again to resume our "Let's Play Jeopardy Program" with more to learn about the elbow.

Alex asks, "Are you ready?" First question for \$400.

* The painful lump on the inner aspect of the elbow. What is medial epicondylitis?

The bony prominence is normal, but when it and attaching tissue becomes very inflamed and tender it greatly affects use of the elbow. X-rays are typically normal. I find that heat, ice and medication can help, but often don't. Injection of Celestone and/or physical therapy treatment are more curative.

* Ouch, I hit my funny bone. What is ulnar neuritis?

On the inner aspect of the elbow joint behind the normal lump is the large ulnar nerve. When it is irritated it sends a burning numbness down the forearm to the little finger. That happens when you hit your funny bone. Not too funny is it? Well imagine if it didn't go away. That is ulnar neuritis. When the nerve begins to act up like this I have to move it to a new neighborhood to give it a chance to feel better. The surgery is pretty common and is called ulnar nerve transfer.

* A sudden pain, snap and weakness in the front of the elbow. What is biceps tendon rupture?

The large tendon that attaches the biceps muscle to the front of the elbow can tear or rupture. It is usually caused by lifting or straining with the arm. It causes pain and weakness, black and blue appearance and a Popeye muscle appearance in the upper arm. Surgery is frequently needed to repair this serious injury.

* Generalized pain and stiffness in the elbow. What is elbow arthritis?

True arthritis of the elbow joint is not all that common. It can come on gradually even years after an injury. Rheumatoid arthritis

does affect the elbow, but that is an unusual type of arthritis compared to osteoarthritis (wear and tear arthritis).

If the arthritis is severe enough, some patients have undergone total elbow replacement. Never heard of it? I'm not surprised, because there are not a lot of them done.

* Painful elbow in an adolescent boy. What is Little Leaguer's elbow?

Too much pitching or using improper technique can cause stress on the elbow of a growing child, usually a boy. The growth plate, tendons and ligaments, and articular surfaces of the elbow joint make it uniquely susceptible to injury in throwing sports. Pain, swelling or stiffness is never O.K. in a growing child and should always be evaluated.

In smaller children even though the elbow may be the source of the problem your child may not say it is the elbow. He or she may say the shoulder hurts or even the wrist or collar bone. A child can't always isolate the source of where they hurt. But they wince if you touch the elbow and that is a good clue that you have located the source of the trouble.

Are we finished with the elbow? You betcha! Oops, I have to stop saying that.

In your spare time you can check out anything about the elbow on our office teaching web site, www.orthopodsurgeon.com / Your Orthopaedic Connection.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush