

Orthopaedic Connection

Little Leaguer's Elbow

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

What Is It?

Everyone has heard of Little Leaguer's Elbow, but few people really have much understanding of it. It just sounds like a sore elbow in a little kid on a baseball team.

It is a painful elbow in a child who has pitched too many innings or has used improper technique. Actually shoulders can be affected too.

It is caused by excessive pull on the tendons and ligaments on the inside part of the elbow and too much compression on the outside part of the elbow.

Signs and Symptoms

The player feels pain on the knobby portion of the elbow on the medial or inside part. Swelling may be present. Then movement or range of motion will begin to be restricted. The elbow may at times feel as if it is locking temporarily.

Big Problem

Studies of youth baseball show that 20% of children 8 – 12 years of age and 45% of those 13 – 14 years will suffer from arm pain during a baseball season.

Pitch Count

Age 8 – 10	52 pitches per game
Age 10 – 12	68 pitches per game
Age 13 – 14	76 pitches per game

Ignore Symptoms = Disaster

If you or your child ignores the symptoms, serious complications arise. What is happening is this. The tendons and ligaments are pulling away tiny bone fragments that disrupt normal growth. This leads to permanent elbow deformity. In addition the painful elbow that is ignored could lead to a fracture at the growth center.

How I Treat It

Any persistent pain, weakness or loss of motion should disqualify a child from playing until symptoms are evaluated. The pain is the elbow's way of asking for a rest. Rest at least 3 – 5 days completely. No practice or throwing. Apply ice to the elbow for 10 – 15 minutes 3 – 4 times per day. If the pain returns when the child resumes pitching I will do the following.

- Take a careful history
- Examine the elbow and entire upper extremity
- Take plain x-rays
- Maybe get special imaging studies
- Further management of course depends on the findings. If a fracture has occurred pinning might be required.

Prevention

- Limit number of pitches
- Coaches have to be responsible for teaching good technique to decrease elbow strain
- Proper warm up
- Ideally regular exercises that strengthen and stretch the arm and shoulder muscles.
- Most important – parents and grandparents of players who have read and remembered this and will apply the information to their player.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem!

Please log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous GCH articles.

Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush