

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Elbow Arthritis

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Elbow arthritis is not as common as arthritis in the small joints of the hand. In fact arthritis in the arm and shoulder is nowhere near as common as arthritis in the lower extremity. Being much larger weight bearing joints, the knee and hip have a much higher incidence of arthritis.

What Is It?

Elbow arthritis is two things really, that is two different forms of arthritis.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammation of the joint that results in pain and swelling. It is primarily a disease of the joint lining in which the lining or synovium produces enzymes that destroy the articular surface of the joint. It typically affects both elbows and many other joints in the body as well, such as the hand, wrist, shoulder and the feet.

Osteoarthritis

It is also referred to as OA or wear and tear arthritis. In this type of arthritis the cushioning covering on the ends of bones deteriorates and eventually the bones begin to rub together. It commonly affects only one elbow. It sometimes happens with repetitive use such as with baseball pitchers or certain types of manual laborers.

This can cause fragments of bone and cartilage - also called loose bodies - to break away and act like gravel to wear out the joint even further.

Elbow arthritis may result from a non sports injury that damages the joint surface. This is termed post traumatic arthritis.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The common signs of RA are pain and swelling. The pain usually centers on the outside of the elbow and is most noticeable where you turn or rotate your straightened elbow. In later stages of RA the elbow becomes unstable. The ligaments relax and don't hold the elbow as firmly as normal.

With OA, the pain intensifies as you bend your elbow. Pain is present at night as well as during the day when your elbow is at rest. Loose bodies in the elbow become trapped in the joint and limit range of motion in the elbow.

YOU HAVE ARTHRITIS IF ---

- You have difficulty straightening or bending the elbow.
- The elbow catches or locks at times.
- You have stiffness especially early in the morning.
- The elbow is warm or red.

HOW I TREAT IT

After a correct diagnosis is made there are an array of medical and physical treatments that will work best for your particular type of arthritis.

- Over use must be treated by modifying your sports or job activities to relieve symptoms initially.
- Heat first followed by cold is prescribed by most Physical Therapists.
- Advil (or similar) anti-inflammatory medications are standard to relieve pain and inflammation.
- I might choose to prescribe Physical Therapy
- Steroid injections can be helpful.
- Arthroscopic surgery is useful in properly selected patients if other means have not helped.
- Open surgery is sometimes needed if loose pieces are very large or if there are large bone spurs.
- Total joint replacement is sometimes the only remaining option if the joint is terribly arthritic especially in rheumatoid arthritis.

Well, there you have it, a short but complete course in elbow arthritis that may be helpful to you or someone you know.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

All the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information you will ever need is yours at www.orthopodsurgeon.com! And what's more - The

Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive is on the website. Every article I have written for Argus can be located on the Archive. The complete article! Everyone, please check all this out.

It is a wealth of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital. I specialize in you.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives.

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

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush