

Little league elbow
can cause major
league pain



Children's Healthcare of Atlanta™

Sports Medicine

Keep young athletes in the game by t

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta helps thousands of young athletes recover from injuries and get back to the sport they love. A common condition we treat is little league elbow, an overuse injury that affects growing athletes involved in sports that require repetitive throwing motions.

The most striking symptom of little league elbow is pain in the inner elbow. The pain may be severe and can occur abruptly after one hard throw or gradually during the course of a season. There may also be swelling, redness and warmth over the inner elbow.

Little league elbow affects the growth plate of the elbow, an area vulnerable to injury because it is made up of a soft substance called growth cartilage. There are two phases of the throwing motion that put stress on the elbow's growth plate:

- The early acceleration phase—During this phase, there is a pulling or traction force applied to the inner elbow.
- The release phase—During this phase, there is a powerful inward and downward snap of the wrist.

With repetitive throwing activities, and not enough rest in between, the growth cartilage weakens and begins to develop very small cracks. It also may start to pull apart from the arm bone.

What we can do

Our Sports Medicine Program has physical therapists that are trained in helping young athletes that are injured, want to prevent injury or want to enhance their performance. Pediatric-trained and sports-certified therapists evaluate each athlete and teach them proper exercises to assist with range of motion and strengthening. Using motion analysis technology, we can analyze throwing mechanics and develop a gradual, safe and functional throwing progression.

treating the injury early and properly

Little league elbow does not usually cause permanent damage. If it is caught early and treated properly, the elbow will heal completely and there will be no long-term effects.

If the injury to the growth plate is more severe or there is significant separation from the bone, casting may be necessary. On rare occasions, the injury is severe enough that surgical pinning is necessary to reattach the growth plate fragment.

X-rays may be used to rule out other causes of elbow pain. Our radiologists base the amount of radiation needed on each child's size and condition. This keeps exposure as low as possible.



What you can do

As with many orthopaedic aches and pains related to overuse, the symptoms of little league elbow can be relieved by resting from athletic activities that are increasing the pain and a combination of other treatments, including:

- Ice—Applying ice immediately after a workout can be an effective anti-inflammatory treatment.
- Medicine—Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can be another effective treatment. Your doctor may suggest an over-the-counter medicine, such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxen (Aleve), or may prescribe medicine. Take as directed.
- Activity modification—If the injury is minor and caught early, an athlete can play a different position that doesn't require much throwing. For example, in baseball, batting or playing first base would not put more stress on an injured elbow.





Visit choa.org/sportsmed for more information.



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This is general information and not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.