

Compliments, comments & complaints

If you'd like to compliment, comment or complain about our service please contact our Customer Services Department:

Customer Services Department

Livewell Southwest
Room AF3, Local Care Centre
200 Mount Gould Road
Plymouth
PL4 7PY

Tel: 01752 435201

Email: customerservicespch@nhs.net

Contact details

The Minor Injuries Units are open every day of the year, including Bank Holidays.

Minor Injuries Unit Cumberland Centre

Damerel Close
Plymouth
PL1 4JZ

Tel: 01752 434390

Opening times: 8:30am - 9pm

Minor Injuries Unit South Hams Hospital

Plymouth Road
Kingsbridge
TQ7 1AT

Tel: 01548 852349

Opening times: 9am - 5pm

Minor Injuries Unit Tavistock Hospital

Spring Hill
Tavistock
PL19 8LD

Tel: 01822 612233

Opening times: 8am - 10pm

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 Livewell Southwest

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Information & Advice

Pulled Elbow

Minor Injuries Unit

Cumberland Centre
South Hams Hospital
Tavistock Hospital

This information leaflet is designed to supplement the information the Practitioner has already given you about your child's elbow.

What is a pulled elbow?

This is a common injury which usually affects children under 5 years. It happens when one of the forearm bones partially slips out of a fibrous ring ligament at the elbow, which secures the radius to the ulna. Medically, this is known as a radial head subluxation.

The story of how it occurred and an examination of your child's arm will help us to diagnose a pulled elbow. An x-ray is not normally needed.

What causes a pulled elbow?

A pulled elbow happens because young children's joints are fully developed and the ring shaped ligament is looser at this age.

Usually the arm has been stretched or pulled forcefully along the direction of the length of the arm.

This is commonly done by:

- You and your child moving quickly in opposite directions whilst holding hands.
- Lifting your child up by one hand.
- Pulling an arm through a sleeve whilst dressing.

How is it treated?

Your child may be given some pain relief if you haven't already done so before you attended the unit.

Once the examination has shown there is no other injury, your child's arm will need to be moved in a particular way to manipulate the head of the radius bone back to the correct position.

This is a quick and simple manoeuvre, but may cause a brief moment of discomfort. Often a click is felt as the bone slips back into position.

Shortly after this your child should be able to start using their arm, especially if distracted by playing with a toy, but sometimes this can take a few hours or more.

We expect your child to make a full recovery within a few days.

It is extremely rare for a pulled elbow to result in any long term damage.

To prevent this from happening it is best to avoid swinging games, pulling or lifting your child up by the hand. Use the upper arms or arm pits to lift them.

You should:

Give pain relief.

Please give your child regular simple painkillers such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen suspension as directed on the bottle if the arm is a little sore or swollen.

You should not:

Pull on your child's arm, e.g. games where you swing your child by their arms or tugging your child along by their arm when you are in a hurry.

Also try to ask other children, grandparents or relatives to not pull on your child's arm.

When to seek help

Please bring your child back to the MIU or Emergency Department if after 24 hours:

- There is increased pain in elbow
- Your child is not using the arm
- You are worried about them
- You think it has happened again.

Remember

A pulled elbow can happen at any time on either arm until your child is about 7 or 8 years old. At this time the elbow has grown enough to stop moving out of its fibrous ring, so please be careful with your child's arm.