



Occult Elbow Injury

What is an occult elbow injury?

An occult elbow injury is when clinicians can tell from a physical exam that something has happened to the elbow, but the injury does not show up clearly on an x-ray. A bone may have been bruised or fractured, but the actual crack in the bone could be almost impossible to see. An x-ray may show swelling, but the bones appear undamaged.

Occult elbow injuries are common, especially in younger children. They occur most often as a result of what we call a FOOSH (fall onto an out-stretched hand). FOOSH injuries can be caused by falls off a scooter, skates or monkey bars, as well as direct hits in sports like football, hockey or lacrosse.

How is this injury treated?

Since there is a chance there could be a fracture, we will likely put your child's arm in a cast. Adolescents and teenagers may start with a sling instead of a cast, as their bones are more mature. They are also more likely to get stiff after casting than younger children.

In order to leave room for swelling, your child will probably be started off with a split cast on their arm. We tape the sides of the cast with cloth medical tape. In case the tape starts to peel off, you can buy more medical tape at a pharmacy. You may also use cloth athletic tape or duct tape, but avoid these if your child has a latex allergy. The cast is held tightly in place from the inside, so it should not fall apart if the tape does start to peel. We do not usually use waterproof casts as first casts due to swelling.

Will my child be in pain?

Soreness is usually at its worst in the first few days through the first week after an injury. Pain from soreness can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) as needed. **Always talk with your provider about allergies your child may have before giving over-the-counter medication.**

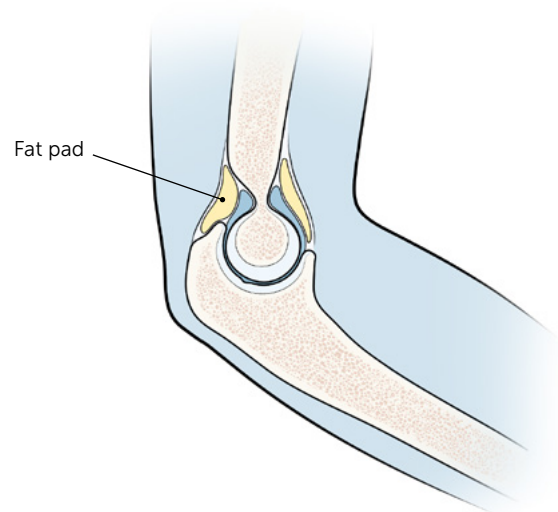
Swelling in the fingers is common. Help your child keep the arm and hand lifted or resting above their heart to reduce swelling.

Can my child be active?

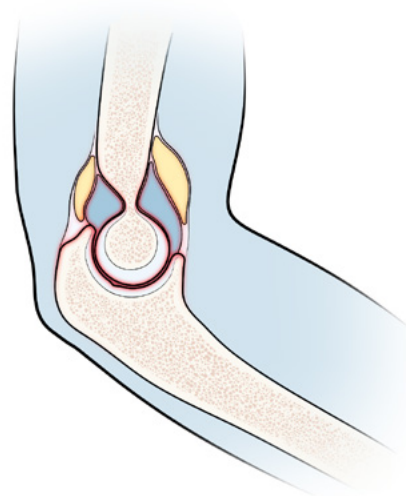
While the cast provides some protection, any blow to the arm could make the injury worse. Your child should not do activities that put them at risk of falling or taking a direct hit to the arm. This includes activities like:

- playing on playground structures (i.e. jungle gyms or swing sets)
- contact sports like basketball, hockey or soccer
- horseback riding, ice skating or skiing

Healthy



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How long will my child be out of sports?

We will assess your child and make recommendations based on how the injury looks and the potential risks of the sport your child plays. This kind of elbow injury usually keeps patients out of contact sports for about four to six weeks. However, if we see a fracture during a follow-up appointment, the time frame could change.

After the cast comes off, your child will likely be able to use their arm normally for activities like eating dinner or brushing their teeth. But they will need to wait before playing sports and other rigorous activities.

