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# What is a pulled elbow?

Information for patients  
Accident and Emergency Department



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## **How does a child sustain a pulled elbow?**

- ❖ Pulled elbow is an injury suffered by children usually aged less than 5 years old.
- ❖ It is often the result of a sharp jerking or pulling action on the child's hand or forearm, for example catching hold of a child's arm to prevent them from running into the road.
- ❖ Children are often reluctant to use or move the injured arm.

## **Is it a dislocation?**

No. The bones are in the right place. Because a child's elbow is not fully mature, it is possible for a ligament to slip over the head of one of the arm bones (called the radius), making it painful for the child to move its arm.

## **Does my child need an x-ray?**

Usually not. If the nurse or doctor is very sure that the injury is a pulled elbow, an x-ray is not necessary as there is no injury to the bones.

## **What can be done?**

In most cases a simple manoeuvre will relocate the ligament. Sometimes this does not work immediately, and then we will review your child in one to two days. There is no long term damage to the elbow from this.

## **Will it happen again?**

It might. After the age of 5, however, it is unlikely to happen as the elbow joint has matured.