

Elbow Pain

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



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www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

What causes elbow pain?

Elbow pain is common and can happen at any age. Some people may get it more often than others. Although elbow pain can be very painful, it is usually **not** caused by anything serious.

Some potential causes of elbow pain are:

- muscle, tendon or ligament injuries (e.g. sprains, strains or tears); two very common causes of elbow pain are 'tennis elbow' and 'golfer's elbow'
- age-related changes in the joint, also known as osteoarthritis
- sudden changes in activity levels – such as doing much more than usual or being much less active.
- repetitive or overuse injuries of the muscles/tendons around the elbow
- poor sleep, stress, feeling low or very tired can also make pain worse

What are the symptoms?

Everyone's symptoms can be different, but you may feel:

- pain around the elbow
- stiffness when bending or straightening your arm.

- pain when leaning on the elbow
- difficulty lifting or gripping things
- weakness in the arm

Pain can vary from day to day. This does **not** mean you are causing damage.

Self-help

Most new elbow pain will improve within **6-8 weeks**. These useful tips should help with your recovery:

- change activity levels – don't stop completely but reduce or adjust what you do at first
- keep the arm moving – gentle movement helps stop stiffness and won't cause harm
- use simple pain relief – ask a pharmacist or GP for advice
- stay at work or return as soon as you can – your employer or GP can help with adjustments
- look after your sleep and stress – both can affect pain
- try gentle exercises – moving regularly and doing simple exercises can help
- use heat or ice – a heat pack, hot water bottle or ice pack can ease pain (don't put this onto bare skin)

Should I refer myself to physiotherapy?

You may benefit from physiotherapy if:

- your elbow pain is not improving after a few weeks despite the above advice
- pain is affecting your work or daily activities
- you are struggling with gripping or lifting
- you keep getting repeated episodes of elbow pain

When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Elbow pain is **rarely serious**, however go to **Accident & Emergency or an Urgent Care Centre straight away** if you have:

- pain or difficulty moving the elbow following a fall or injury
- a visible deformity of the elbow
- a significant swelling, redness or heat around the elbow with a fever
- a sudden loss of power or sensation affecting the arm

Contact your **GP or call 111 urgently** if you have:

- new, unexplained elbow pain with a history of any of the following:
 - cancer

- HIV
- TB
- inflammatory arthritis
- elbow pain combined with any of the following:
 - feeling unwell
 - a loss of appetite
 - fever
 - unexplained weight loss
 - night sweats
- pain affecting both of your elbows with a lot of stiffness in the morning

Remember

Most elbow pain **improves with time, gentle movement and the right advice**. Keeping the arm moving and returning to normal activities helps recovery.

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/



Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources [www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

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