



Little Leaguer's Elbow

What is Little Leaguer's Elbow?

Little Leaguer's Elbow is an *overuse injury of the medial elbow* seen in throwers (especially *baseball pitchers*). It includes a spectrum of injuries including: *stress fractures* of the growth plate (medial epicondyle), *avulsion fractures* of the medial epicondyle, *inflammation of the growth plate (apophysitis)*, and *ligament and soft tissue injuries* of the medial elbow. The medial elbow is a common area for injury because the growth plate is weaker than the muscles and ligaments that attach to the area. Little Leaguer's Elbow most commonly occurs between the ages of 8-15 years old at which point the growth plates fuse.

Signs & Symptoms:

Symptoms usually start as gradual pain on the inside of the elbow but occasionally the patient has a pop in that area. The patient may also notice a decrease in speed and/or distance of throws.

Risk factors include:

- Pitching > 80 pitches per game
- Inadequate rest between outings
- Throwing breaking balls before 15 y/o
- competitive pitching > 8 months each year
- Fastball speed > 85mph
- Participating in showcases

How is it diagnosed?

Most Little Leaguer's Elbow is diagnosed clinically and with X-ray (often both elbows). Occasionally MRI is needed.



Acute Treatment:

Treatment is based on the suspected type of injury (ie: stress fracture vs avulsion fracture vs soft tissue injury):

- Rest from throwing and batting for *at least 4-6 weeks*
- Ice, NSAIDs (Ibuprofen, Naprosyn, Voltaren gel, etc.)
- Physical Therapy – can hasten recovery after initial period of pain subsides
- A temporary splint x 2-3 wks is used in certain cases (ie: fractures)

When can I return to sports/work?

- OK to begin “return to throwing” after the initial rest period only if pain free with throwing
- Return should begin with a progressive throwing protocol spanning *several weeks* before full return to sport.
- Full return to sport is typically *3 months* from initial treatment of injury
- MLB “PitchSmart” is an excellent online reference for pitching protocols to prevent future injury

Do I need surgery?

Most Little Leaguer's Elbow does not need surgery. However, surgery may be required for: displaced fractures

How can I prevent Little Leaguer's Elbow?

- Avoid year-round baseball
- Avoid throwing breaking balls until growth plates are closed
- Limit excessive throwing – watch pitch count, limit showcases