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Nursemaid's Elbow (Pulled Elbow)

What is nursemaid's elbow?

Nursemaid's elbow is an injury to a ligament in the elbow. The ligament is a strong band of tissue that keeps the 2 bones of the forearm in the right place.

This problem is also called a pulled elbow. It is not a common injury after age 3.

What is the cause?

Nursemaid's elbow is caused by a strong pull on the elbow. The pull can tear the ligament in the elbow joint.

This injury often happens when an adult pulls on a young child's arm or the child falls away from an adult while being held by the arm.

What are the symptoms?

A child with this injury will not use the injured arm and will hold the arm in a bent position close to the body. The injury can cause some pain, but the pain is usually not severe. Your child will have more pain if the arm is moved.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your child's symptoms and medical history and examine your child. X-rays of the elbow are usually not needed.

How is it treated?

Your healthcare provider will move the bone and the ligament back to their correct places. Once the ligament and bone are back in their proper places, your child usually can start to use his arm again within a few minutes.

How can I take care of my child?

The ligament needs time to heal, so be very gentle with your child's arm.

Your child may have a small amount of swelling or pain in the joint. Talk to your healthcare provider about medicines that can help with the pain and swelling. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, your child should not take NSAIDs for more than 10 days.

Once an elbow has been injured, it is more likely that it will happen again. Don't lift your child by the arm or pull hard on your child's arm.

Ask your healthcare provider:

- How long it will take your child to recover from this injury
- If there are activities your child should avoid and when your child can return to normal activities
- How to take care of your child at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if your child has them

Make sure you know when you should bring your child back for a checkup.