Elbow

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When to see your GP/ call 999/111.

If you try to self- manage your pain but it does not seem to improve within a couple of days.

Your Pain in your arm is brought about by exercise and relieved by rest, and is associated with pain in your chest, upper back, neck and or Jaw. (Maybe a sign of Angina)

You think your arm maybe broken (deformity, loss of strength, painful reduced movement, very tender to touch, an audible snap at the moment of injury, any sign of the bone poking through the skin)

Your arm becomes red, hot and swollen, and is associated with fever like symptoms. (Temperature, feeling unwell, signs of infection)

You have a loss of sensation around the upper arm or the whole arm. (This may also include loss of power, grip strength etc.)

1: Sprain or Strain

Normally associated with an overuse or change in activity levels (Sometimes called a Repetitive Strain Injury or RSI). This will normally subside if you follow the PRICE M&M method.

How to Treat

PRICE M&M

Protect- Try not to further damage the area by wearing a support/sling, which covers the area.

Rest - Try not to do any activity that may put the area at risk. Aim to rest the area from Sport or too much activity for 48-72 hours.

Ice- (after 48-72 hours Heat may also be beneficial). A bag of frozen peas/ ice packs etc. Wrap in a damp tea towel and compress it (use cling film or tie around the other side of the shoulder). Do either 10 minutes on 10 minutes off 10 minutes on. Or no more than 20 minutes on in one sitting. Aim to do this regularly throughout the day in the initial phase. Do not fall asleep with the Ice Pack on and always check the area to avoid skin irritation/ice burns.

Compress- bandage or compress the area to reduce the swelling and to avoid painful movements. Elasticated bandage is effective but it should not be so tight that it restricts blood flow as this could be dangerous. For the same reason, please do not sleep with the bandage on.

Elevate- Keep the affected area raised and supported on a pillow to try and limit the swelling/ place it in a sling. Try to avoid long periods where your arm is raised above the level of your heart as it is harder for your body to return blood to the heart and you may experience numbness.

Medication- Always check with a Pharmacist/ GP about what you can and cannot take safely, always follow the instructions on the packet. As a rule, Ibuprofen (anti- inflammatory) is generally more effective at night and first thing in the morning to reduce the swelling. Paracetamol is used to reduce the pain. You may also wish to try Ibuprofen gels etc.

Management- Every shoulder is different but in the initial phase of injury, it is always best to be cautious, so where possible try to avoid direct Heat (for 48-72 hours).

Alcohol consumption should be reduced to limit further injury

Running or exercise should be limited until the swelling starts to subside

It is good to still move the joint (within a pain free range), as much as your body will allow. Try not to keep it still for long periods as it will only become more difficult to move once you have to!

2: Golfer’s or Tennis Elbow

Also known as Medial Epicondylitis (Golfer’s) and Lateral Epicondylitis (Tennis), again they are commonly associated with overuse activities or a change in activity levels.

How to Treat

In most cases these conditions are manageable using the PRICE M&M method.

PRICE M&M

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Rest - Try not to do any activity that may put the area at risk. Aim to rest the area from Sport or too much activity for 48-72 hours.

Ice- (after 48-72 hours Heat may also be beneficial). A bag of frozen peas/ ice packs etc. Wrap in a damp tea towel and compress it (use cling film or tie around the other side of the shoulder). Do either 10 minutes on 10 minutes off 10 minutes on. Or no more than 20 minutes on in one sitting. Aim to do this regularly throughout the day in the initial phase. Do not fall asleep with the Ice Pack on and always check the area to avoid skin irritation/ice burns.

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The following exercises maybe beneficial:

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/elbow-pain/tennis-elbow-exercises.aspx>

[file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/6\_tennis\_elbow.pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/User/Downloads/6_tennis_elbow.pdf)

[file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/2044%20Elbow%20Pain%20exercises%2014-1.pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/User/Downloads/2044%20Elbow%20Pain%20exercises%2014-1.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kuj8YLAHZVg>

In some cases, you may still be experiencing problems, you may choose to see your GP who may refer you for a scan (Ultrasound/ MRI), they may choose to inject the joint with a Steroid injection. Or refer you for Platelet Rich Plasma injection. This is a simple procedure where the consultant will take some blood spin it very fast in a centrifuge so that the bold separates. They will then reinject all the Plasma (Red blood cells that carry oxygen) back into the area.

In some cases, after the scan you may have a tear or the tendon may have become detached from the joint. Therefore, you may need surgery. This will either be done arthroscopically (keyhole) or open.

This is illustrated in the flow chart below.

**TENNIS/GOLFERS ELBOW**

Traumatic

SLOW

Tear

**No**

Tear

SURGERY

**OPEN**

REST, ICE,

**PHYSIO**

Scan

Patient Better!

**IF** Patient Not Better **3/12**

Evaluation

Inject / PRP

**PHYSIO**

MRI

SURGERY

**Arthroscopy**

**IF** Patient Not Better **3/12**

3: Bursitis

The very back of your elbow is known as the Olecranon, it is a very important attachment site for muscle tendons and ligaments, it also allows the passage of blood vessels nerves and your Lymphatic system (drainage).

Surrounding this joint are Bursae; these are little pockets of fluid that keep the joint lubricated and allow tissues to glide and slide over one another.

In certain circumstances, these bursae may become inflamed, either by direct trauma, or by an infection. In certain cases, it is related to overuse or compression of the area.

How to Treat

In most cases the bursitis can be self- treated with the PRICE M&M method:

PRICE M&M

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In certain circumstances, you may have had the bursitis caused by a scratch or an insect bite. In this case see your GP who may administer antibiotics. You should seek the advice of your GP if your elbow appears to be infected.

In certain circumstances, your GP/ Physio may choose to inject the joint with a steroid to reduce the inflammation.

4: Trapped Nerve

This can either be because of a trapped nerve in the neck or within the Elbow joint. See the neck section if you feel your neck may be implicated (OA or Trapped nerve).

If you have trapped a nerve in your forearm or wrist it can manifest itself within the elbow. In the wrist Carpal Tunnel syndrome can regularly cause elbow and wrist pain. In the elbow, Cubital tunnel syndrome is also prevalent.

How to Treat

Initially following the PRICE M&M method will resolve most issues.

PRICE M&M

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In certain circumstances if your pain worsens, or if you are not improving then you may wish to see your GP, who may want to inject it with a steroid injection or send you for a scan.

Depending on the results of the scan you may then have to have surgery to alleviate the pain.

5: Angina

This is a heart condition, which occurs when the blood supply to the heart is reduced. This is normally associated with changes in stress or activity levels and eases with rest. Lifestyle is a major factor with Smoking and Diet/ lack of exercise being linked with a narrowing and hardening of the blood vessels going to the heart.

Angina is associated with a feeling of Dullness, heaviness, or tightness in the chest, which spreads to the Jaw, upper back and Left arm. This pain is normally only present for a couple of minutes.

It may be that you only experience pain in the arm, so therefore if you feel that you have these symptoms it is vital that you see your GP as soon as possible, as Angina is a major precursor to heart attack and strokes.