

Looking after a child with an elbow effusion

Information for parents and carers

Your child has attended the Emergency Department with an injury to the elbow. The x-ray shows no obvious fracture (break in the bone) however, there is a sign telling us that there is fluid (usually blood) within the joint. This is called an effusion.

What is it?

The elbow is a complex joint in children. It has many growth areas that can be damaged and cause an effusion.

When we see an effusion, we suspect there could be a fracture, however this is not always the case.

Treatment

We treat an elbow effusion by supporting the arm in a collar and cuff under their clothes. We usually ask your child wears the collar and cuff for 14 days.

Keeping your child comfortable at home

Pain relief – your child may be sore for the first few days. The recommended dose of your child's usual pain relief e.g. paracetamol (calpol) or ibuprofen can be given to keep them comfortable. If your child complains of pain, give pain relief and encourage them to rest.

Activities – it is important to encourage your child in gentle play/activities for the first 2 weeks. This will help reduce the swelling and pain in the elbow. Please do not allow your child to do sports/gym or be involved in rough play.

Gentle movements – please encourage your child to gently move their hand, wrist and shoulders several times a day to stop them becoming stiff.

Hygiene – we recommend that you check the skin under the arm twice daily to ensure your child is not developing a heat rash. A gentle wash twice daily with soap and water and thorough drying will prevent this.

Follow up – please remove the collar and cuff in 14 days. Your child's elbow will be a bit stiff & sore initially as it has not been moved. You may need to give them some painkillers over the next few days.

We would expect your child's elbow to be better and be able to fully straighten their arm out in 3 weeks.

If this is not the case, please phone 0131 312 0007/8 and ask to make a face-to-face review clinic appointment.

If your child is unable to straighten their fingers without a lot of pain, or if you are unable to control their pain with rest and pain relief, please return to the Emergency Department for review.

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us on 0131 312 0007/8

