Contact details
Switchboard: 020 3456 7890
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Emergency Department
University College Hospital
Ground Floor, 235 Euston Road
London NW1 2BU

www.uclh.nhs.uk

Where can I get more information?
Call 111 when you need medical help fast, but it’s not an emergency.

Or visit:
www.nhs.uk/symptomcheckers

UCLH cannot accept responsibility for information provided by external organisations.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this document, please contact us on 020 3447 0083. We will try our best to meet your needs.
What is a pulled elbow?
This is a common injury in children particularly between the age of one and four. It is caused by having their arm pulled, for example, falling over while an adult is holding their hand.

The radius, one of the bones in the elbow, moves out of place and causes the child pain and they stop using their arm.

Pulled elbow can also be called slipped elbow or toddler elbow. The medical term for a pulled elbow is radial head subluxation.

How is it treated?
The doctor or nurse practitioner can put the bone back in the correct place. It will be momentarily painful while this is carried out.

Once the bone is back in place the symptoms usually go away quickly, but it may take some time for the child to use their arm fully.

Occasionally, the radius bone does not slip back easily and so your child will be put into a sling and you will go home. In this case you will be asked to return and be reviewed by a senior doctor.

Is there any long-term damage?
The injury does not cause any long-term damage. Some children are prone to this injury and it occurs easily and commonly so adults should not feel guilty if it happens while they are holding the child’s hand. There may be a possibility that this injury may re-occur.

As children grow the radius changes shape and pulled elbows no longer occur. It is rare in children over five years of age.

What should I do if my child is still in pain?

Care at home
A child that has had a pulled elbow should not be in too much pain or discomfort. You can give pain relieving medicine such as paracetamol (please read the instructions on the bottle first).

Call your GP or come back to the Emergency Department
Your child should not require pain relief for more than one day after the injury. If your child is still in pain, or is not using their arm fully for more than one day, call your GP or return to the Emergency Department.