

Osteochondritis Dissecans of the Elbow

Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) of the elbow affects a small area of bone and its cartilage covering. Cartilage is the smooth tissue that helps a joint move. Elbow OCD often involves the capitellum, the rounded end of the upper arm bone on the outside of the elbow. The damaged area may loosen or separate.

Symptoms to have assessed

Outside elbow pain during throwing, gymnastics, or other arm loading can be a warning sign. Swelling, catching, or locking may also occur. Stop activities that bring on pain and arrange an assessment. Tell your clinician promptly if the elbow locks or symptoms worsen.

How the diagnosis is checked

Your clinician will ask about symptoms and sports, examine the elbow, and usually obtain X-rays. An MRI may help assess the cartilage and affected bone. Elbow pain has several possible causes, so symptoms alone cannot confirm OCD.

Treatment and return to sport

Treatment depends on growth, the size of the affected area, and whether the bone and cartilage remain stable. A stable injury may improve with rest from impact activities and follow-up. A splint or cast may be needed. An unstable fragment or persistent symptoms may require surgical assessment.

Ask which activities are allowed and how healing will be checked. Resume loading and sport through your clinician's plan, rather than testing the elbow repeatedly or relying only on pain relief.

Related reading

- Little Leaguer's Elbow
- Elbow Sprains

Sources and further information

- Nationwide Children's Hospital: Osteochondritis dissecans of the capitellum
- AAOS: Osteochondritis dissecans

This handout provides general education. Your treating clinician can explain how it applies to your injury.