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Physical Therapy Brings Motion to Life

Little League Elbow

Little League Elbow, also known as medial epicondyle apophysitis, is a common injury that occurs among young baseball players. Caused by “overuse” and “repetitive motion,” Little League Elbow causes pain and swelling inside of the elbow, and can limit one’s range of motion.

Causes

The forceful and repetitive nature of overhand throwing for baseball players (pitchers in particular) can cause inflammation of the growth plate inside the throwing elbow, causing Little League Elbow. Adolescent baseball players are most likely to experience this injury because their elbow structure (bones, growth plates, and ligaments) is not fully mature or developed.

The following risk factors contribute to Little League Elbow:

- **Age.** Young baseball players (particularly between the ages of 9 and 14) are at greater risk because their elbow joint (bones, growth plates, and ligaments) are not fully developed and are more susceptible to overuse injuries.
- **Pitching too many games.** The number of games pitched should be carefully monitored and the league’s pitch count rules followed. Research has proven that overuse in baseball contributes to injuries such as Little League Elbow.* If pain occurs before pitch count limit is reached, the player should stop immediately. Rotating pitchers within games is a good idea to ensure adequate rest is given to each pitcher.
- **Curveballs and breaking pitches.** Both of these types of pitches appear to put more stress on the growth plate than other pitches.** These pitches should be limited, especially in players between the ages of 9 and 14.
- **Improper mechanics.** Improper throwing mechanics can put undue force on the elbow joint. Proper throwing mechanics can help a young player avoid unnecessary injury and develop proper technique that improves their game.

How a Physical Therapist Can Help

Physical therapists are experts in restoring and improving mobility and motion in people’s lives, and eliminating pain. For young baseball players, this means a physical therapist can work with you to help prevent Little League Elbow from occurring, and recover if it has occurred.

In addition to following the guidelines for pitch counts and recommendations for rest, a physical therapist can help baseball players prevent the occurrence of Little League Elbow by teaching them stretching and strengthening exercises that are individualized for their specific needs. Everybody is different, which means Little League Elbow may occur for different reasons for each person. A physical therapist can help a player recover by designing an individualized treatment plan to regain range of motion, flexibility and strength.

Find a physical therapist in your area at www.moveforwardpt.com

*Fleisig et al: Am J Sports Med 2011

**Lyman et al: Am J Sports Med 2002

