

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## Why Does My Elbow Hurt?

### Amy Horwitz, DO

Ronald Januchowski, DO, FCOFP, Editor • Paula Gregory, DO, MBA, CHCQM, FAIHQ, Health Literacy Editor

#### CAUSES OF ELBOW PAIN

##### Tennis Elbow (Lateral Epicondylitis)

Tennis elbow is one of the most common causes of elbow pain. It is a type of tendinitis or inflammation of the tendons. Although it is called tennis elbow because it happens with the motions of playing tennis, it is most commonly caused by overusing the elbow. Most people notice they have pain when shaking hands and pain with pressing on the outside of the elbow. It may also cause decreased grip strength or pain with bending your wrist back.

##### GOLFER'S ELBOW (MEDIAL EPICONDYLITIS)

Golfer's elbow is less common than tennis elbow, but it is also a type of tendinitis. It can happen with the motion used to swing a golf club, but happens more often with general overuse. With golfer's elbow, there is pain on the inside of the elbow. There may also be pain with lifting and bending your wrist down.

##### OLECRANON BURSITIS

A bursa is a fluid filled sac that helps provide padding around a joint. Olecranon bursitis causes pain and swelling over the back of the elbow when the bursa becomes inflamed. Olecranon bursitis is usually caused by putting a lot of pressure on the back of the elbow. There are typically no problems with full movement of the elbow because the bursa is located at the back of the elbow. Your elbow may become infected and cause fevers and chills.

#### FRACTURES

You can break (fracture) any of the three bones that make up your elbow joint. Fractures of the elbow happen most when falling forward and bracing the fall with your arms. With fractures, the elbow may be bruised or swollen. Fractures are diagnosed with an x-ray.

#### ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is the inflammation of a joint. With arthritis, there may be pain and difficulty fully moving the elbow. There are many types of arthritis, but it is most commonly caused by wear and tear on your joints.

#### WHEN TO VISIT YOUR DOCTOR

You should see your doctor if you have:

- Pain that does not improve with rest and ice after 3-5 days
- Worsening swelling, redness or bruising of your elbow
- Problems moving your arm
- A fever or chills with your elbow pain

#### DOWNLOAD AND DISTRIBUTE

The PDF of this patient education handout is available for easy download and distribution to your patients at [www.acofp.org/PEH](http://www.acofp.org/PEH).