Elbow Subluxation

Elbow subluxation is a partial or minor dislocation of the elbow. **This is the most common elbow injury in children up to age 5**. This injury happens most often when the child's hand is pulled too hard or when the child is lifted or swung around. It has been called “Nurse Maid’s Elbow” labeled after the action of lifting a child off the ground by pulling up on the child’s arm. Immediately after such an injury, the child will usually be fussy, but the pain may not last for long. Until the dislocation is corrected, the child may hold the affected arm by their side and refuse to reach out or use it. Elbow x-rays are normal in this condition and are usually not needed to make the diagnosis.

The treatment of elbow subluxation is a simple maneuver. It moves the head of the radius bone back to its normal position. The child is usually willing to use the arm within minutes after this procedure. Have your child rest the injured arm for the next 2 days. Use a sling if this makes your child feel better. Avoid pulling the affected arm again, especially over the next 2 weeks. Follow-up with your caregiver as recommended.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child continues to protect the affected arm.
- Lacks full motion of the elbow within 2-3 days.
- Complains of persistent pain.

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