



Elbow bursitis

You came to the emergency department with a swelling at the back of your elbow. The doctor thinks this is elbow bursitis. This sheet explains what it is and how to care for it at home.

What is it?

A bursa is a small, flat sac of fluid that lets the skin slide over the bony tip of the elbow. Leaning on the elbow, a knock, or sometimes gout can make it fill with fluid and swell. It is usually not painful unless it becomes infected. Most cases settle by themselves over a few weeks.

Looking after yourself at home

- Avoid leaning on your elbow. Use a soft pad if you have to rest your arm on a hard surface.
- Put a cold pack wrapped in a cloth on the swelling for 15 to 20 minutes, a few times a day.
- Keep moving your elbow gently so it does not become stiff.
- Do not try to drain or pierce the swelling yourself.
- Keep any cut or graze over the elbow clean and covered.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may help too, unless your doctor said no. Avoid it if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or are pregnant.
- If you were given antibiotics, take them as prescribed and finish the whole course.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if the swelling has not gone down after 2 to 3 weeks.
- If you were given antibiotics, see your family doctor within 2 days to check it is improving.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- The elbow becomes red, hot and more painful
- Redness spreading along your arm, or red streaks running up it
- Fever, shivering or feeling unwell
- Pus or fluid leaking from the swelling
- You cannot bend or straighten your elbow because of the pain



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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