

Osteochondritis Dissecans of the Elbow



What is osteochondritis dissecans?

Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) of the elbow is a condition most commonly seen in young athletes that participate in sports with repeated overhead motion, such as baseball or softball, gymnastics, weightlifting, and tennis. Repetitive stress to the elbow joint that occurs during these activities can result in injury to the underlying bone and cartilage.

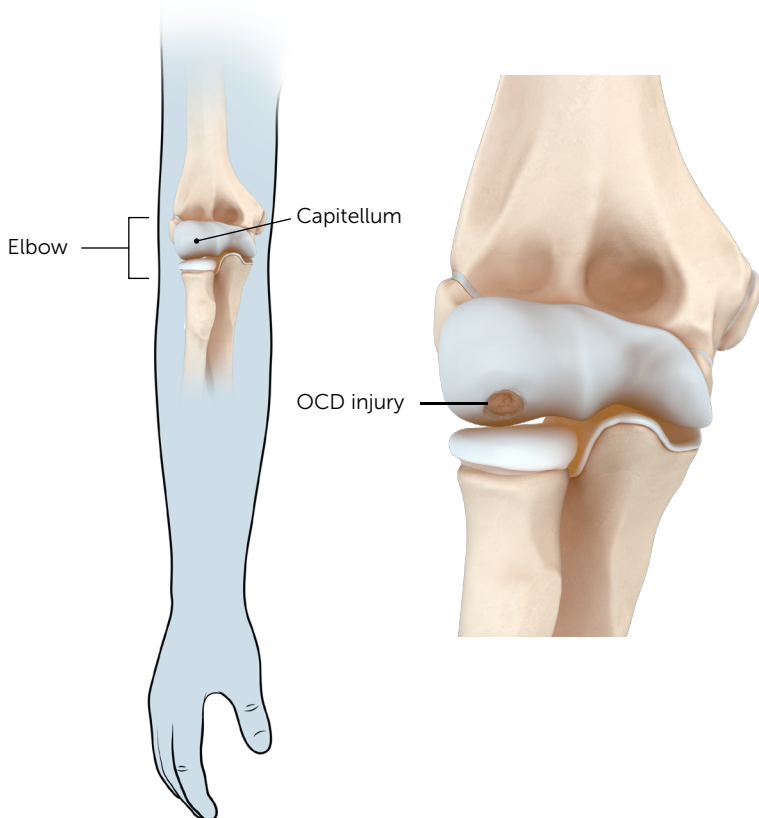
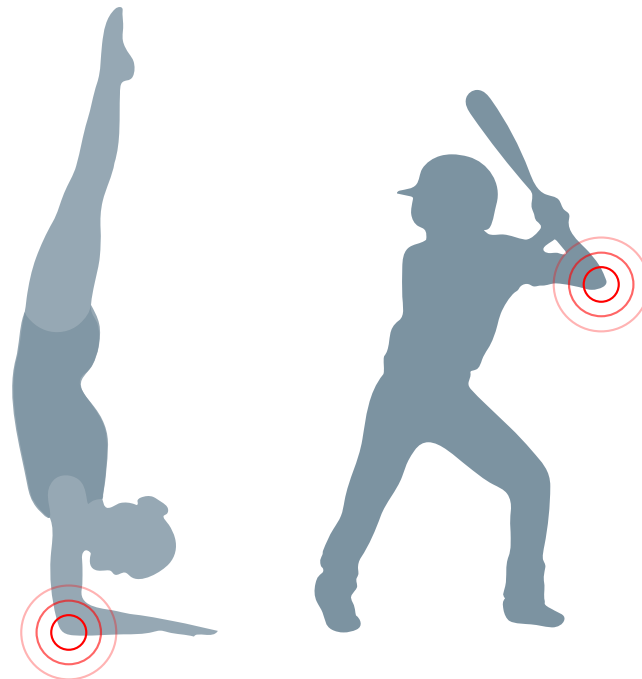
Without treatment, injured bone and cartilage may become unstable and break off into the joint. Long-term consequences may include worsening elbow function and arthritis.

What are the symptoms of osteochondritis dissecans?

The most common symptom of elbow OCD is pain, which is often worse following activity. Over time, elbow discomfort can become continuous and patients may develop other symptoms such as:

- Swelling or stiffness
- Difficulty straightening the elbow joint fully
- Feeling like the joint is "locking", "catching" or "giving way"

The signs and symptoms of osteochondritis dissecans can resemble those of other joint injuries, so it is important that your child see a doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment.



What causes osteochondritis dissecans?

Young athletes involved in high-impact sports can sustain an OCD injury from repetitive motions that stress the joint. Sports that can increase the risk of osteochondritis dissecans of the elbow are gymnastics, squash, tennis, baseball and weightlifting.

How is osteochondritis dissecans diagnosed?

To diagnose OCD of the elbow, an orthopedic specialist will ask questions about your child's symptoms and perform a specialized physical exam of the elbow. An X-ray or MRI is often taken to better see and assess the joint.

How is osteochondritis dissecans treated?

In some patients, stable injuries can be treated without surgery. This non-surgical treatment consists of complete rest of the affected elbow followed by physical therapy.

Surgical treatment of osteochondritis dissecans may be necessary if the bone or cartilage is unstable, has broken off loose fragments into the joint, or if rest and physical therapy were not successful at relieving pain.

