Elbow Pain

Elbow pain can be caused by a variety of conditions, including tennis elbow, tendonitis, ligament strains and tears, fractures, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or following a traumatic injury. These conditions can all produce elbow pain, pain with activities, and elbow stiffness.

How does this happen?

Elbow pain may have multiple causes. The most common cause is a traumatic injury to the elbow. This includes elbow fractures, dislocations, and ligament tears. Elbow pain may also develop from overuse, after beginning a new sport or exercise routine. Elbow pain is not always caused by an injury. It can also develop slowly over time, from daily “wear and tear”, especially for those who use their hands a lot at work. When the elbow hurts, it may feel better not to move it or keep it in a sling, and it can become stiff. Stiffness can also result from arthritis, although this is less common.

How will we know that this is your problem?

The diagnosis of the cause of elbow pain is made by your physician, using a combination of history (when the elbow hurts, what makes it worse, and what makes it better) and exam of the elbow. Your physician may also obtain X-rays, CT scan, and MRI to gain additional information.

How can this be treated?

Our physicians at the Tulane Institute of Sports Medicine treat elbow pain of all varieties in all patients. The initial treatment often involves anti-inflammatory medications (NSAID's) that can be prescribed for pain. Sometimes bracing or splinting is required, with rest from any sporting or aggravating activities. Physical
therapy and home exercises may be helpful to improve range of motion and strength. When non-operative treatment fails to provide relief, surgery may be an option. Surgery may also be necessary for certain fractures or ligament tears. Arthroscopic surgery (surgery through a scope) may be performed for certain conditions, while other conditions may require an incision. When severe arthritis is present, an elbow replacement may offer the best chance of decreasing pain and improving function.

Drs. Michael O'Brien and Felix H. (Buddy) Savoie perform surgery on the elbow for multiple conditions. Drs. O'Brien and Savoie are fellowship-trained in Shoulder and Elbow Reconstruction. They offer a wide range of surgical reconstructions, including elbow arthroscopy, fracture treatment, ligament repair and reconstruction, and elbow replacements. Drs. O’Brien and Savoie have had excellent success performing arthroscopic elbow surgery to decrease pain, improve range of motion and function, and help patients get back to work and the activities they enjoy (see below for recent publications).

The Tulane Institute of Sports Medicine offers on-site X-Ray and MRI, as well as its own Physical Therapy department with licensed physical therapists, in order to ease your visit and speed your recovery.