The Little Leaguer’s Elbow

What Is It?
 Everyone has heard of Little Leaguer’s Elbow, but few people really have much understanding of it. It just sounds like a sore elbow in a little kid on a baseball team. It is a painful elbow in a child who has pitched too many innings or has used improper technique. Actually shoulders can be affected too.

It is caused by excessive pull on the tendons and ligaments on the inside part of the elbow and too much compression on the outside part of the elbow.

Signs and Symptoms
 The player feels pain on the knobby portion of the elbow on the medial or inside part. Swelling may be present. Then movement or range of motion will begin to be restricted. The elbow may at times feel as if it is locking temporarily.

Big Problem
 Studies of youth baseball show that 20% of children 8 – 12 years of age and 45% of those 13 – 14 years will suffer from arm pain during a baseball season if they are pitchers.

Pitch Count
 Age 8 – 10  52 pitches per game
 Age 10 – 12  68 pitches per game
 Age 13 – 14  76 pitches per game

Ignore Symptoms = Disaster
 If you or your child ignores the symptoms, serious complications arise. What is happening is this. The tendons and ligaments are pulling away tiny bone fragments that disrupt normal growth. This leads to permanent elbow deformity. In addition the painful elbow that is ignored could lead to a fracture at the growth center.

How It Is Treated
 Any persistent pain, weakness or loss of motion should disqualify a child from playing until symptoms are evaluated. The pain is the elbow’s way of asking for a rest. Rest at least 3 – 5 days completely. No practice or throwing. Apply ice to the elbow for 10 – 15 minutes 3 – 4 times per day. If the pain returns when the child resumes pitching the following needs to be done.

- Office visit
- Take a careful history
- Examine the elbow and entire upper extremity
- Take plain x-rays
- Maybe get special imaging studies
Further management of course depends on the findings. If a fracture has occurred pinning might be required, but this is very unusual.

**Prevention**
- Limit number of pitches
- Coaches have to be responsible for teaching good technique to decrease elbow strain
- Proper warm up
- Ideally, regular exercises that strengthen and stretch the arm and shoulder muscles.
- Most important – parents and grandparents of players who have read and remembered this and will apply the information to their player.

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All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.
Be well.
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