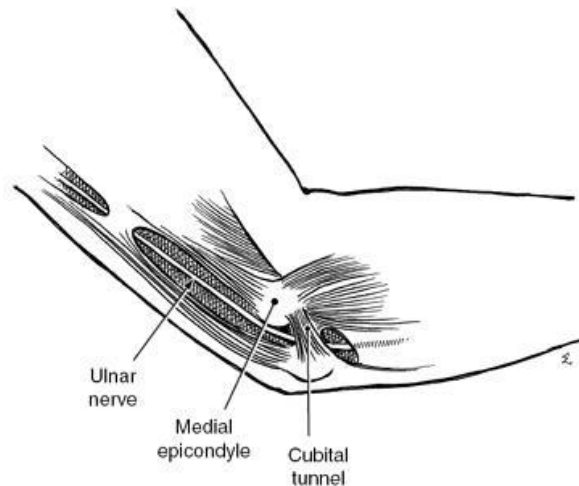


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Cubital Tunnel Syndrome (Ulnar Neuritis)

Cubital tunnel syndrome is a nerve disorder at the elbow and upper arm that causes pain, tingling, hand weakness, and often a loss of feeling in the ring and little fingers. There is compression or stretching of the ulnar nerve at the elbow and in the forearm by muscles or ligament-like tissues. This nerve has little tissue protecting it at the elbow which increases the risk of bruising if it receives a direct blow. Ulnar nerve dysfunction or inflammation may greatly decrease athletic performance in sports that require strong hand or wrist actions.



Frequent Signs and Symptoms

- Tingling, numbness, or burning inside the forearm or in the little finger and/or ring finger
- Sharp pains shooting from the elbow to the wrist and hand
- Hand weakness, clumsiness, and heaviness
- Poor dexterity (fine hand function)
- A weak grip, especially power grip, and a weak pinch
- Increased pain with forced full-elbow bending
- Tenderness of the inner elbow
- Reduced performance in sports that require a strong grip
- Reduced control with throwing such as pitching
- Aching or soreness of the inner elbow



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Etiology (Causes)

- Pressure on the ulnar nerve at the elbow, arm, or forearm caused by swollen, inflamed, or scarred ligament tissues, or between muscles
- Stretching of the nerve due to loose elbow ligaments
- A direct blow to the nerve at the elbow
- Repetitive elbow bending

Risk Factors

- Sports or occupations that require repetitive and strenuous throwing motions such as baseball and javelin throwing
- Contact sports such as football, soccer, and rugby
- Other injury to the inner elbow including medial epicondylitis and loose inner elbow ligaments
- Poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- Inadequate warm-up before practice or play
- Diabetes mellitus
- Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid gland)

Prevention

- Appropriately warm up and stretch before practice or competition.
- Maintain appropriate conditioning:
 - Wrist, forearm, and elbow flexibility
 - Muscle strength and endurance
 - Cardiovascular fitness
- Wear proper protective equipment, including elbow pads.
- Use proper throwing techniques.

Outcomes

This condition is usually improved with appropriate treatment; sometimes it heals spontaneously. Surgery is usually only necessary if muscle wasting or nerve changes have developed.

Potential Complications

- Permanent numbness and weakness of the ring and little fingers
- Weak grip
- Permanent paralysis of some hand and finger muscles
- Risks associated with surgery, including infection, bleeding, injury to nerves (including the ulnar nerve), recurrent or continued symptoms, and elbow stiffness



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Treatment Considerations

Initial treatment consists of rest from the offending activity and medications and ice to reduce inflammation. Leaning on the elbow should be avoided. The use of an elbow pad or elbow splinting (usually only at night) may be recommended to prevent full bending of the elbow. Stretching and strengthening exercises of the muscles of the forearm and elbow are important. Referral to a physical therapist or an athletic trainer may be recommended for treatment. If this treatment is not successful, surgery may be necessary to reduce compression of the nerve. Assessment for proper throwing mechanics is important before returning to competition.

Possible Medications

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin and ibuprofen (do not take within 7 days before surgery), or other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, are often recommended. Take these as directed by your physician. Contact your physician immediately if any bleeding, stomach upset, or signs of an allergic reaction occur.
- Pain relievers may be prescribed by your physician, usually only after surgery. Use only as directed.

Modalities (Cold Therapy)

Cold is used to relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Cold should be applied for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for inflammation and pain and immediately after any activity that aggravates your symptoms. Use ice packs or an ice massage.

Notify my office if symptoms worsen

