

Pulled Elbow

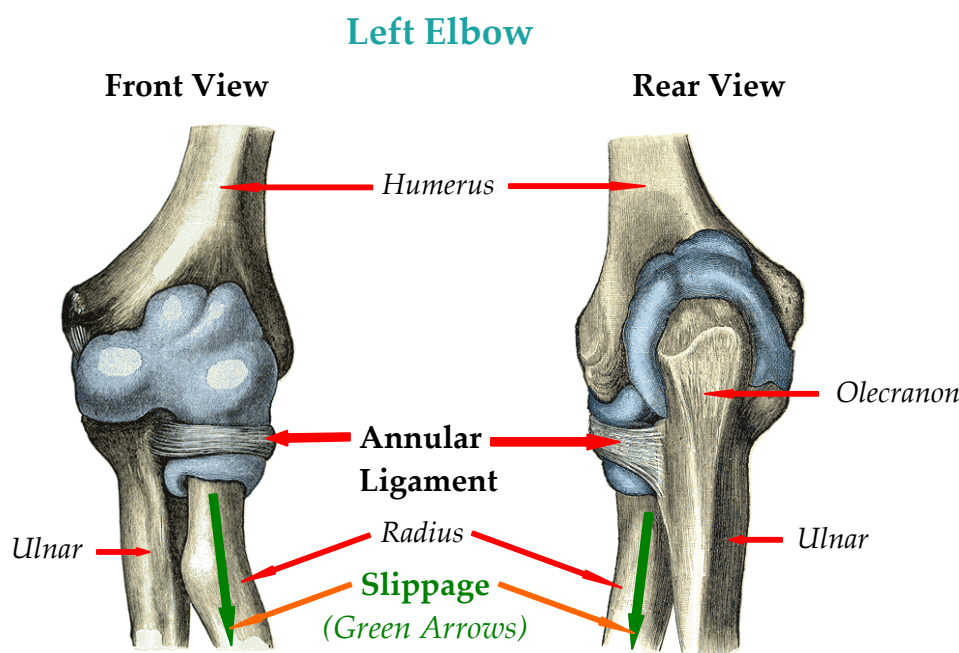
One of the bones in your lower arm (the radius) has slipped out of its location next to the other bone (the ulnar).

The condition is sometimes called “Slipped Elbow” or “Nursemaid’s Elbow”. This problem usually occurs in young children aged between 1 and 3 years, with incidence decreasing with increasing age. It is rare in a child beyond 7 years of age, because the *annular ligament* is softer in younger children, and hardens and strengthens with age. There is a slightly greater incidence in female children (65%). Although rare in adults, it **does** occur, and when it does it is most often confused with tennis elbow (*lateral epicondylitis*).

(a) History of Onset

It is possible for the injury to be caused by a fall, but commonly a sudden jerk of the arm of a child, will do it, generally due to a frustrated parent (or nursemaid) pulling an obstinate child along by one hand; hence the common name *nursemaid’s elbow*. This applies slips the *radial head* (top of the radius bone of the forearm) partially slip out from under the *annular ligament*, whose role is to hold the radius against the ulnar bone. See the green arrows in the illustration below. The radius is *not* fully dislocated, and x-rays generally *appear* normal.

Important Structures in Pulled Elbow



(b) Symptoms

There has usually been a sudden onset of pain at the elbow, and the child will likely be weepy, and refusing to use or move the arm, supporting the affected arm using the other hand, and usually holding the arm slightly flexed to an angle of about 15° with the palm down. There will be tenderness at the head of the radius right near the area where people experience tennis elbow.

(c) Treatment

Your practitioner will be able to gently manoeuvre the radius bone back into its position under the annular ligament.