

Little League Elbow

As the Red Sox head down to spring training in Florida and we start seeing a little more daylight and sun, it got me thinking about spring and baseball season.

Many local High School and Junior High School baseball teams will be holding tryouts and starting practices to get ready for the new season. Barring snow on the fields, the season usually starts in early April for local teams. The air is cold, the bat vibrates on the cold hands, the ground is wet, and most of the players have taken the winter off or have been focusing on their winter sport of choice.

This quick start to the baseball season in cold New England weather does not allow for a proper warm-up before starting the season. Because there is no “spring training” for our local youth baseball teams many players has just a few practices before they are on the mound pitching in the regular season. This can lead to many overuse injuries found in youth sports. As a Physical Therapist one of the most common overuse injuries I see with young baseball players is “Little League Elbow”. Medically known as Valgus Strain of the elbow, Medial Epicondylitis, or Medial Elbow Apophysitis, Little League Elbow is defined as pain on the inside of the elbow while throwing or pitching. The pain is due to a strain of the medial structures of the elbow including bone, tendons, and the ulnar collateral ligament which supports the inside of the elbow. Because bones are still growing before puberty, the growth plates of the bones are more susceptible to injury when the ligaments attached to them are stressed by overhead throwing. Despite the name, Little League Elbow does not affect just Little Leaguers. It can affect any youth pitcher in the game.

Symptoms of Little League Elbow can consist of pain on the inside of the elbow, possible swelling, pain with gripping or carrying, and elbow pain while throwing. The pain can be caused by several different issues. These include improper stretching and warm-up, throwing too hard, throwing too many pitches, throwing curve balls or sliders at too young of an age, or improper throwing mechanics at the elbow and/or shoulder joints.

Physical Therapy can provide an athlete with information on performing proper stretching and warm-up programs, shoulder and elbow strengthening programs, and education on the proper pitch count based on a young pitchers age. Prevention of Little League Elbow should always be the focus for coaches and parents of these young athletes.

There are many treatments that can be performed in Physical Therapy for the care of Little League Elbow. If you are a baseball player or know someone playing baseball this spring and are interested in an evaluation of your elbow focusing on throwing mechanics, learning about proper stretching, and receiving a great elbow and shoulder strengthening program to start before the season, please call (603)895-2600 to make an appointment at Excel Physical Therapy in Raymond, NH.

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