

Elbow Arthritis: Patient Information Sheet

What is Elbow Arthritis?

Elbow arthritis is a condition where the cartilage in the elbow joint wears down over time, causing the bones to rub together. This can lead to pain, stiffness, and reduced movement. There are several types of elbow arthritis:

- **Osteoarthritis:** Caused by wear and tear, often in people over 40 or after previous injuries.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis:** An autoimmune condition causing inflammation of the joint lining.
- **Post-traumatic arthritis:** Develops after a fracture, dislocation, or significant injury to the elbow.

Symptoms

Common signs of elbow arthritis include:

- Pain during or after activity
- Stiffness, especially in the morning or after resting
- Swelling around the joint
- Reduced range of motion or difficulty straightening/bending the arm
- Grinding or popping sensations (crepitus)

Causes and Risk Factors

- Previous elbow injuries or fractures
- Repetitive movements or heavy use of the elbow
- Age-related cartilage wear
- Autoimmune diseases (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis)
- Family history of arthritis

Diagnosis

Your doctor may use:

- **Medical history and physical exam:** To assess pain, swelling, and movement.
- **X-rays:** To check for bone changes and cartilage loss.
- **MRI or CT scans:** To evaluate soft tissues and detailed joint structure.
- **Blood tests:** Sometimes used to identify autoimmune causes.

Treatment Options

Non-Surgical

- **Activity modification:** Avoid repetitive or heavy movements that worsen pain.
- **Pain relief:** Over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen or anti-inflammatories.
- **Physiotherapy:** Exercises to improve strength and flexibility.
- **Braces or supports:** Help reduce stress on the joint.
- **Corticosteroid injections:** Reduce inflammation and relieve pain short-term.

Surgical

Surgery may be considered if symptoms are severe or unresponsive to non-surgical treatment:

- **Arthroscopy:** Minimally invasive procedure to remove loose fragments or repair cartilage.
- **Joint replacement:** Rare for the elbow but may be an option in advanced arthritis.
- **Fusion (arthrodesis):** Fuses the bones to relieve pain but limits movement.

Self-Care Tips

- Apply ice packs for pain and swelling.
- Use gentle stretching and strengthening exercises as advised by your physiotherapist.
- Maintain a healthy weight to reduce joint stress.
- Avoid prolonged repetitive activities that strain the elbow.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your doctor if you experience:

- Sudden worsening of pain or swelling
- Difficulty moving your elbow
- Numbness, tingling, or weakness in the arm or hand
- Signs of infection (redness, warmth, fever)

Please Contact Us for further advice: info@basinghandclinic.co.uk