

Dislocations (Shoulder, Knee Cap, Elbow, Finger)



A joint is the place where your bones come together. Normally, bones glide smoothly within your joints, allowing a wide range of motion. But a bone can be pushed or pulled out of position. This is known as a dislocation. Dislocation prevents normal joint movement and can be very painful. Prompt treatment is needed.

Causes of dislocations

Dislocations can happen to almost any joint. But they're most common in the shoulder, knee cap, elbow, and finger. Dislocated elbows happen most often in children. Many dislocations result from injury, such as a blow or fall. But some can happen during normal activities. A shoulder can dislocate when you throw a ball.

When to go to the emergency room (ER)

A dislocation needs emergency care. Injuries that aren't treated quickly take longer to heal. You may have lasting damage to the joint. Get medical help right away if you:

- Have severe pain in a joint
- Can't move the joint normally
- Can see the misplaced bone
- Have numbness or tingling
- Have a break in the skin over the painful joint

What to expect in the ER

- You will be given pain medicine to make you more comfortable.
- The joint will be examined. An X-ray may be taken to check for breaks (fractures) or other injuries.
- To restore normal alignment, the joint is gently and slowly moved back into correct position. You will receive pain medicine before this procedure.
- A dislocated finger or elbow may be splinted to keep it from moving while it heals. An injured shoulder may be placed in a sling.
- You may get a second X-ray before you leave the hospital.
- In most cases, you will be referred to a bone specialist (orthopedist) or a primary care sports medicine healthcare provider for follow-up evaluation and treatment.

Reduce swelling and pain due to a dislocation

Tips to reduce swelling and pain:

- Apply ice to the joint. Keep a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Raise the injured area above heart level if you can.

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