ATKINS
PHYSIOTHERAPY
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ELBOW ARTHRITIS

The elbow joint is formed between the lower end of the upper arm bone and the upper ends of the two bones in the forearm. The joint is designed to allow the elbow to bend and straighten and the forearm to twist to allow the palm of the hand to face upwards and downwards. Arthritis may occur at the elbow joint when it will be painful and stiff to bend the elbow towards the face and also to fully straighten the elbow.

Rheumatoid arthritis is the most common arthritis to affect the joint but stiffening with osteoarthritis may also be found that is usually painless. If an osteoarthritic joint is suddenly overstretched, as in falling onto the hand or strap hanging in the tube, then a painful traumatic arthritis may arise making it difficult to take the hand to the mouth.

The inflamed joint needs to be rested but physiotherapy can help by recommending the use of ice if swelling is present and by using gentle massage and mobilisations with the advice to keep the joint moving without provoking the pain. The amount of movement will increase as the inflammation settles and guidance will be given on how to increase activities to return to full function, without aggravating the joint.

If the elbow doesn't respond to this conservative management, an injection may be given into the joint.