ATKINS
PHYSIOTHERAPY
CONSULTANTS

LOOSE BODY IN THE ELBOW JOINT

Loose bodies are small fragments of cartilage or bone that can form in joints; particularly the hip, knee and elbow.

In adolescents, a condition called 'osteochondritis dissecans' (small cracks in the superficial cartilage and underlying bone) can lead to the formation of loose bodies, especially if they are involved in activities such as gymnastics, throwing and racquet sports. Loose bodies can also be found in the middle-aged or elderly group too though when they are usually associated with osteoarthritis.

Loose bodies don't have to cause problems and they can often be stable and fixed within the joint space. If they are free in the joint they may become trapped between the bone ends where they may give rise to twinges of pain, locking of the elbow joint or blocked or 'springy' movements.

Physiotherapy can help by applying a special technique that stretches out the joint a little to give the loose body room to move, and then applying a few sharp flicks to jolt the loose body into a more comfortable position. Sounds more scary than it is!

If the pain is severe and debilitating surgical removal may be necessary.