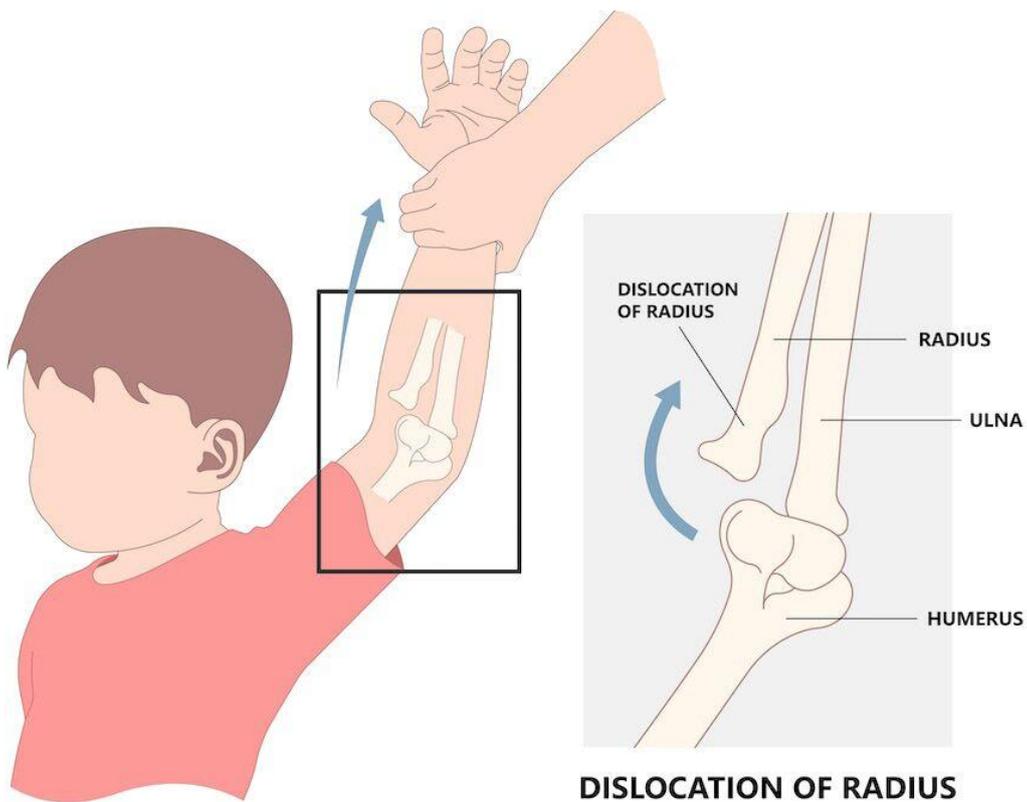


Radial Head Subluxation (Nursemaid's Elbow)



What is Radial Head Subluxation?

Radial head subluxation—commonly known as **Nursemaid's Elbow**—is a minor injury where one of the forearm bones (**the radius**) slips slightly out of its normal position at the elbow joint.

It is **very common in young children**, especially ages **1–5 years**, because their ligaments are still loose and developing.

What Causes It?

It usually happens when a child's arm is **pulled suddenly**. Common scenarios include:

- Pulling a child up by the hand or wrist
 - Lifting a child quickly by one arm
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- Swinging a child by their hands
 - Breaking a fall while holding hands
 - Rolling over awkwardly during sleep (less common)

It is **not usually a sign of abuse**, and it can happen accidentally even with gentle pulling.

Symptoms

Your child may show:

- Sudden crying or distress after the incident
 - Pain around the elbow
 - Refusal to use the affected arm
 - Arm held close to the body with elbow slightly bent
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- No swelling or bruising (usually)

The child avoids moving the arm because it hurts, not because of a fracture.

Diagnosis

A healthcare professional can diagnose radial head subluxation by:

- Asking what happened
- Examining the arm and elbow
- Checking for movement and comfort

X-rays are **not normally needed**, unless the history is unclear or another injury is suspected.

Treatment

A trained clinician can gently perform a quick manoeuvre to move the bone back into place (**reduction**). This takes only a few seconds.

After the reduction:

- Children usually **start using the arm again within minutes**.
- Some may take **10–20 minutes** to fully recover.
- Pain relief is rarely needed afterwards.

If symptoms do not improve, further assessment may be needed.

Caring for Your Child at Home

After the elbow is put back in place:

- Your child can use the arm normally.
- No sling is usually needed.
- Mild discomfort may last a short time but improves quickly.
- Avoid pulling or lifting the child by their hands or wrists.

How to Prevent It Happening Again

Children who have had one episode may be slightly more likely to have another.

To reduce the risk:

- Do **not** lift or swing your child by their hands or arms
- Lift under the arms instead
- Avoid pulling the child forward suddenly when walking
- Teach siblings not to tug their brother/sister by the arm

Most children grow out of this tendency by age **5–6 years**.

When to Seek Medical Help

Return to a healthcare professional if:

- Your child refuses to use the arm after **20–30 minutes**
- There is swelling, bruising, or visible deformity
- There was a fall or direct injury
- Your child is unusually distressed or unwell
- The problem keeps coming back