

DISLOCATION OR SUBLUXATION

DESCRIPTION

Dislocation is injury to a joint so that adjoining bones no longer touch each other. *Subluxation* is a minor or incomplete dislocation where the joint surfaces still touch, but are not in normal relation to each other. The structures involved are the ligaments and bones in joints, especially the shoulder, kneecap, and fingers. Occasionally, there may be an associated fracture.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Sudden joint pain, swelling or deformity after an injury with limited or absent movement around a joint.

CAUSES

- Usually a traumatic injury that stretches or tears ligaments that surround a joint and hold the bones together
- Shallow or abnormally formed joint surfaces (congenital)
- Rheumatoid arthritis or other diseases of ligaments and tissues around a joint.
- Loose Ligaments

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Usually curable with prompt treatment. After the dislocation has been corrected (reduced), the joint may require immobilization with a cast, splint or sling for 2 to 6 weeks, often followed by physical or occupational therapy.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Damage to nearby nerves or major blood vessels, causing numbness, coldness or paleness.
- Recurrent subluxation or dislocation.
- Arthritis of affected joint
- Fracture of joint

GENERAL TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Initial treatment for dislocations is to manipulate the joint to reposition the bones (reduce the joint), performed by trained personnel, usually without surgery. After this is done, treatment consists of medications and ice to relieve pain and joint protection with a splint, cast brace and/or sling (for upper extremity) to allow the ligaments and muscles to heal. Recurring dislocation may require surgical reconstruction (tightening or replacement of injured structures) or replacement of the joint.

Physical therapy may be necessary to regain motion of the joint after immobilization or surgery and to regain strength of the muscles around the joint.

MEDICATION

- General anesthesia, sedation or muscle relaxants to make replacement of proper joint alignment possible. After this, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin and ibuprofen are often recommended to reduce inflammation (do not take if surgery planned within 7 days). Take these as directed. Contact your physician immediately if any bleeding, stomach upset or an allergic reaction occurs.
- Other medications, such as acetaminophen, may also be used to relieve moderate pain.
- Narcotic pain relievers may be prescribed by your physician for severe pain. Use only as directed and only as much as you need.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF:

- Symptoms get worse or do not improve despite treatment.
- You have difficulty moving a joint after injury
- Any extremity becomes numb, pale or cool after injury... This is an Emergency!
- Dislocations or subluxations occur repeatedly

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