Range Of Motion May Be A Predictor For Elbow Injuries In Major League Baseball Pitchers

Certain elements of a pitcher's throwing mechanics can increase the risk for elbow injuries, according to information presented by researchers at the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine's Annual Meeting today in Chicago, IL.

The researchers examined 296 MLB pitchers throughout eight seasons from 2005-2012. Pitchers with a deficit of more than five degrees in total range of motion (TRM) in their dominant shoulder had a 2.3 times higher risk of injury, while pitchers with a deficit of five or more degrees in shoulder flexion of the dominant shoulder had a 2.8 times higher risk of injury.

"Overhead throwing athletes like baseball pitchers are already prone to a unique set of elbow injuries," said Kevin Wilk, DPT from the American Sports Medicine Institute in Birmingham, AL. "With this in mind, we wanted to explore whether specific elements of the throwing motion can contribute to a greater injury risk."

Patients' passive range of motion (PROM) measurements for the study were assessed by clinicians with a combined 35+ years of experience, including 30 years of combined experience performing spring training physicals for professional baseball players.

"While we only identified 50 individual elbow injuries in this study, they resulted in an average of 51 days on the disabled list – or about one-fourth of a major league season," noted Wilk. "Hopefully our data can help team physicians and athletic trainers work to prevent these types of long-term injury absences."

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