

CLINICAL SKILLS: EXAMINATION OF THE ELBOW

There are 6 main concepts that need to be remembered for ALL of the regional examination of the musculoskeletal system:

1. **Position** – always position your patient as you would like to examine them before you begin
 2. **Look** – inspect and observe the patient and around the patient's bedside
 3. **Feel** – for example, feeling a joint to see if it is hot or swollen
 4. **Move** – actively (the patient moves the joint) then passively (you do the movements for them)
 5. **Function** – can the patient move their joints in order to complete day to day tasks?
 6. **Special tests** – if applicable
- **Wash hands**
 - **Introduce yourself**
 - **Ask permission to examine the relevant part of the body**
 - **Expose the patient – ideally in underwear only, at least exposing the joint of interest and the joints above and below this**
 - **Reposition the patient – standing up at first**

Position:

- Position standing up

Look:

- At front, back and sides of elbow
- For signs such as;
 - Carrying angle
 - Nodules
 - Olecranon swelling (may suggest bursitis)
 - Psoriatic skin changes

Feel:

- Temperature
- For nodules
- With the elbow at 90 degrees:
 - Feel the olecranon for pain and deformity
 - The medial and lateral epicondyles for pain and deformity

Move:

- Actively and passively:
 - Extension
 - Flexion
 - Pronation
 - Supination

Function:

- Put your hand to your mouth

To conclude the examination:

- Thank the patient
- Tell them they can get dressed now
- Offer to examine the joint above and the joint below
- Consider neurological examination of the limb examined

The complete examination of the musculoskeletal system includes:

- [Examination of the hand and wrist](#)
- [Examination of the elbow](#)
- [Examination of the shoulder](#)
- [Examination of the spine](#)
- [Examination of the hip](#)
- [Examination of the knee](#)
- [Examination of the ankle and foot](#)