

TENNIS ELBOW

(Epicondylitis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of bony areas of the elbow. This involves the elbow muscles, tendons and epicondyle (a bony prominence on the outside of the elbow where muscles of the forearm attach to the bone of the upper arm). Most often affects adults (20 to 40 years).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain and tenderness over the epicondyle.
- Weak grip.
- Pain when twisting the hand and arm, as in using a screwdriver or playing tennis.

CAUSES

Partial tear of the tendon or rubbing of the tendon over the bone caused by:

- Chronic repetitive stress on the tissues that attach the forearm muscles to the elbow area.
- Sudden strain on the forearm.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Occupations that require strenuous or repetitive forearm movement, such as mechanics or carpentry.
- Participation in sports that require strenuous or repetitive forearm movement, such as tennis.
- Poor physical conditioning.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't play sports, such as tennis, for long periods until you are in excellent condition. Take frequent rest periods.
- Tennis racquets can aggravate tennis elbow. Choosing a different size or type (larger, more flexible, larger grip) may help.
- Get professional help if you are just learning tennis. Technique and conditioning are important in preventing injuries.
- Do forearm conditioning exercises to build your strength gradually.
- Warm up slowly and completely before participating in sports, especially before competition.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable, but treatment may require 3 to 6 months.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Complete ligament tear, requiring surgery to repair.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests are usually not necessary (X-rays are usually always negative).
- Treatment normally consists of medications and supportive care.
- Use heat or ice to relieve pain. Use warm soaks, a heat lamp or soak in a whirlpool or use cold compresses or ice packs (whichever seems to help the most).
- You may receive diathermy, ultrasound or massage treatments. These help bring quicker symptom relief and healing.
- Massage therapy and manipulation.
- You may need to wear a forearm splint to immobilize the elbow. Do the following exercise 3 or 4 times a day while wearing the splint: Stretch your arm, flex your wrist, then press the back of your hand against a wall. Hold for 1 minute.
- If other methods of treatment fail, surgical release of the tendon at the epicondyle may be necessary.
- Consider using a tennis-elbow strap when you resume normal activity after treatment.

MEDICATIONS

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to reduce inflammation.
- Injections of anesthetics or cortisone drugs. Cortisone reduces inflammation, and anesthetics temporarily relieve pain.

ACTIVITY

Don't repeat the activity that caused tennis elbow until symptoms disappear. Then resume your normal activities gradually after proper conditioning.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of tennis elbow.
- Symptoms don't improve in 2 weeks, despite treatment.