

Tennis Elbow

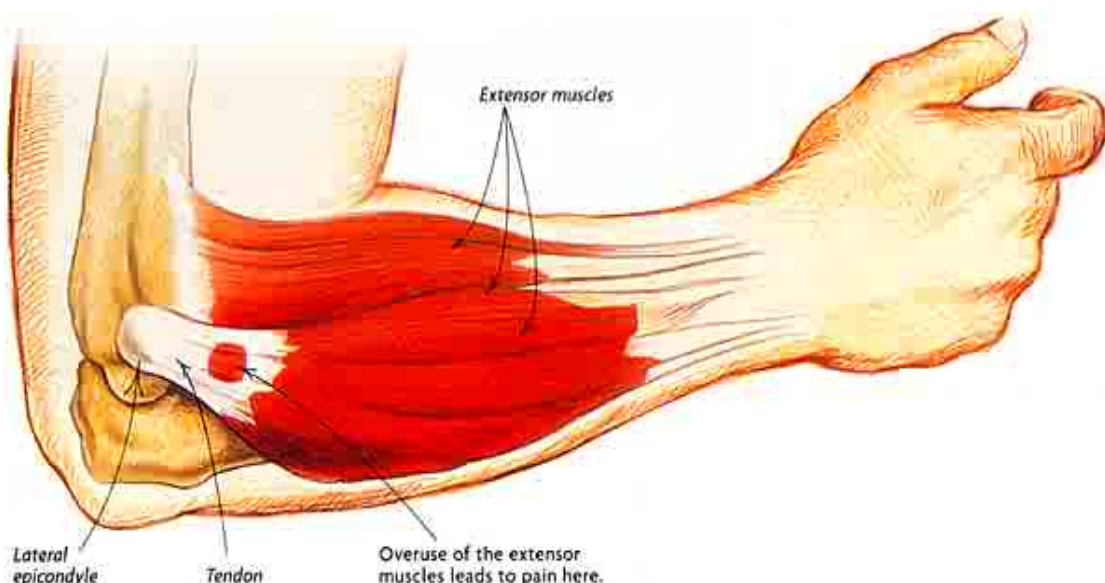
What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow, or the medical term lateral epicondylitis, is caused by a strain to tendons in the forearm. The pain is thought to be due to an injury, or several tiny injuries, to one or more of these tendons. An injury can cause a tiny tear to a tendon and lead to inflammation and scarring of the tendon. Any activity that involves gripping and twisting of the forearm can cause this type of strain – most aren't actually related to tennis or any kind of exercise! Golfer's elbow is a similar condition that affects the inside of the elbow joint near the funny bone.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of tennis elbow are variable. They range from mild discomfort when you move your arm e.g. opening a jar, to constant pain that can affect your sleep. The outside of your elbow will feel tender to touch and there may be swelling. You may also have pain further down your forearm towards your wrist. Repetitive movements of the wrist will make the pain worse.

Tennis elbow is more likely to occur if you have unfit forearm muscles – for example, you do a DIY project or some gardening when you are not used to strong forearm actions. However, even if you are used to heavy work you can overdo it and injure a tendon. People whose work involves repeated twisting and gripping actions are prone to getting tennis elbow. In some people the condition develops for no apparent reason.



What are the treatment options for tennis elbow?

Pain relief

Pain killers or anti-inflammatory painkillers are commonly used to ease the pain. It is important to take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue exercising. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking them. There are various brands which you can buy, or get on prescription. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Ice packs can sometimes provide relief. Try using a pack of frozen peas wrapped in a towel over the area twice a day for 10 minutes. Be careful as ice can burn.

Modifying your activities

You will recognise which movements fetch on your pain and it may help to modify your activities and avoid repetitive movements to improve your symptoms. For example, lift objects with your palms facing upwards and elbows bent and take regular breaks when you are working or alternate your tasks.

Supports and splints

Your physiotherapist may recommend the use of an epicondylitis clasp, which can help to reduce the strain on your elbow.



Steroid injections

If other treatments do not work or your pain is severe, an injection into the painful area of your elbow may ease the pain. Studies show that short term results with steroid injections are greater than the long term results where physiotherapy is favourable. There are also side effects associated with a steroid injection.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy has been shown to be helpful in the treatment of tennis elbow. Treatments may include massage, ultrasound and a series of stretches called eccentric stretches. Acupuncture may also help to manage your pain. Studies have shown that physiotherapy is superior to steroid injections in the long term.

Autologous blood injection

This procedure involves taking blood from you and injecting it into the damaged tendons at your elbow. It is thought that the blood helps with the healing process. It is generally only considered if other treatments have failed and more research is required into its effectiveness.

Surgery

Only a small number of people require surgery to relieve really troublesome symptoms. It requires removing the damaged part of the tendon.



What is the outlook for tennis elbow?

Pain from tennis elbow usually lasts for 6 to 12 weeks (with modifying your activities and pain relief). In some people it can resolve quicker, while in other people the pain can last for longer (between 6 months and 2 years). Unfortunately it can also return.

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