

Tennis Elbow

Information For Patients

Introduction

Tennis Elbow is a painful condition affecting the outer part of the elbow. It can also be called lateral epicondylitis.

Symptoms

The main symptom is pain and tenderness on the outside of the elbow. In most cases the pain only occurs when you use the forearm and hand, particularly on activities like turning a door handle, lifting or gripping. In some cases the pain is constant. Some people may have pain for just a few weeks while others may experience discomfort for several years.

Causes

The site of pain is where a tendon from the forearm muscles attaches to the bone. The pain is due to inflammation of this tendon. This may have been caused by overuse of the forearm muscles or a direct injury or bang to the elbow. Overuse occurs when the arm has been used excessively for an activity it is not used to, or for a repeated activity over time.

Diagnosis

Tennis Elbow is diagnosed by a Physiotherapist, GP or Consultant examining the arm and hearing about how the symptoms developed. Tennis elbow cannot be seen on XRay.

Treatment

In many cases the condition may get better by itself if excessive or repetitive movements of the forearm or hand are avoided. However, treatment may improve symptoms more quickly.

Rest

It is important to rest the arm from activities that cause pain.

Commonly these are:

- Heavy lifting e.g. carrying heavy shopping.
- Prolonged gripping e.g. ironing, decorating, DIY, playing racquet sports or golf.
- Twisting movements of the forearm e.g. opening bottles or jars.

Anti inflammatory medication

A GP may prescribe medication to ease the pain and inflammation. Some anti-inflammatory medication is also available as a cream or gel, which can be rubbed on to the elbow.

Physiotherapy

This may include home stretching or strengthening exercises, deep massage or ultrasound treatment to settle inflammation.

Exercise 1- Flexion Stretch



Stand or sit with your arm out in front of you at shoulder height. Keep your elbow straight and let your wrist drop downwards. Use your opposite hand to assist this movement until you feel a stretch in the forearm.

Hold for approximately 10 seconds (less if your symptoms worsen).

Repeat between 5 and 10 times depending on your pain.

Exercise 2 – Extension Stretch



Stand or sit with your arm out in front of you at shoulder height. Keep your elbow straight. Hold the fingers of the arm to be exercised with the opposite hand. Slowly extend the wrist using the opposite hand to assist until you feel a stretch in the forearm. Hold for 10 seconds (less if your symptoms worsen). Repeat between 5 and 10 times depending on your pain.

Epicondylitis Clasp

Some people find that wearing a special tennis elbow brace helps to ease their symptoms by reducing the pressure applied to the inflamed tendon.

Corticosteroid injection

If physiotherapy does not help a corticosteroid injection may help. This comprises injection of a small dose of steroid into the affected area to reduce inflammation. The steroid is usually combined with an anaesthetic that also helps to settle pain. If the injection does not work it may be necessary to have another one. It is important to continue to rest the arm for a few weeks after the injection even if the elbow feels better.

Steroid injections do not work in every case.

Following Treatment

Once tennis elbow pain has settled it is important to return to normal activities gradually. If the pain was caused by overuse it is necessary to find another way of performing that activity otherwise the pain may return in the future.

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