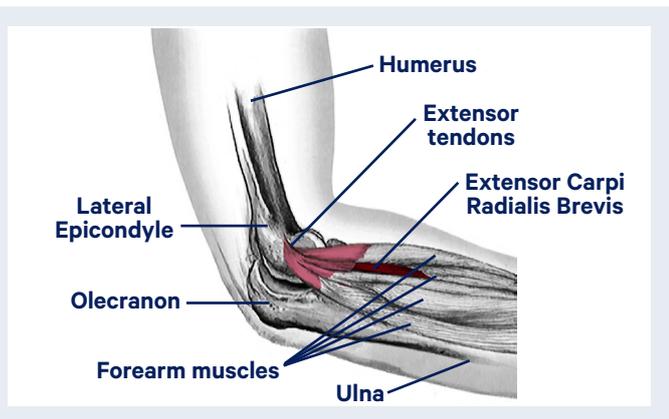


Tennis Elbow

WHAT IS TENNIS ELBOW, AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylalgia) is a painful elbow condition which often happens when tendons in the hand are overworked, usually by repetitive arm and wrist movements over time, for example hammering, painting and work-related activities. It may also happen after a sudden forceful movement, such as the back-hand swing when tennis playing, although this is far less common.



Tennis elbow involves the area where the tendons of the muscle that move your wrist attach to the outside bony area of the elbow, called the lateral epicondyle. When the elbow is first injured there may be swelling around where the tendon attaches to the bone causing pain in this area with certain movements. Often tennis elbow happens over time and degenerative changes can occur within the tendon due to poor blood supply and excessive use. This can result in scarring and micro-tears within the tendon. It can happen at any age but is commonly seen in the 35-50 year old age group and is more likely to be in the dominant arm.

Most commonly you will have pain on the outer side of the elbow and this pain may travel down the forearm. Often there is pain and/or weakness with gripping and lifting activities. You may also experience difficulty with twisting activities during sports or when opening the lid of a jar.

HOW IS TENNIS ELBOW TREATED?

Hand Therapy

Your hand therapist will ask you questions about your elbow, what activities affect the pain and will also discuss your work, sport and hobbies. Your hand therapist will look at your elbow and wrist movements and measure how strong your grip is. From this your hand therapist should be able to tell you whether you have tennis elbow and discuss how best to manage it.

You may need to get x-rays of the elbow to rule out other problems with the elbow joint, although usually with tennis elbow the x-rays are normal. Occasionally an ultrasound scan may be done which can show what's happening to the tendon where it attaches to the bone.

Your hand therapy treatment may include

- Resting the elbow by using a tennis elbow strap or taping to allow the injured area to rest.
- Using a wrist brace to reduce muscle tension at your elbow.
- Icing the painful area and using anti-inflammatory medications, gels and creams help reduce inflammation.
- Massage to the forearm muscles to help reduce muscle tension.
- Specific exercises that gradually stretch and strengthen the forearm muscles and wrist to help healing of the tendon.



When symptoms are from a particular sport or work activity your therapist can suggest ways to change how you use the arm with these activities to lessen/ reduce the pain and help stop a flare up of your symptoms. Learning ways to grip using your ring and little finger can help to reduce the force around the injured elbow.

Surgery

If there is no improvement in your symptoms, your hand therapist may refer you to a specialist for a platelet rich plasma (PRP) injection or a cortisone injection.

If symptoms don't settle after 6-12 months, surgery may be an option, although this is not often needed. Recovery after surgery can take 4-6 months.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY REHABILITATION?

Your symptoms should settle over 6-8 weeks with a new injury or milder cases of tennis elbow. If you have had your symptoms a long time or you have degenerative changes in the tendon, symptoms may last for 4-6 months or longer. Approximately 80-95% of people improve with conservative treatment.

If your symptoms do not settle down your hand therapist can refer you to a hand surgeon who can talk to you more about other treatment options.



Tennis Elbow

Do

- Remember to wear your splint.
- Avoid or modify the activities that bring on your symptoms.
- Rest your arm between activities, especially if you are doing anything heavy or repetitive.

Do Not

- Do lots of forceful gripping at one time.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

- Look for activity that causes pain, swelling or numbness in your hand and arm. Try to avoid this activity and tell your hand therapist.
- If your splint is uncomfortable or rubbing, book an appointment to see your hand therapist.
- If things are getting worse, book an appointment to see your hand therapist.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO NOT HAVE TREATMENT?

In most cases pain and swelling will get worse with time and become much harder to treat. This will affect you in everyday tasks. Treatment is more effective if started within the first few months of symptoms.

CONTACT DETAILS AND REFERENCES

Your hand therapist is _____

Merivale Hand Clinic (03) 3559775

http://www.assh.org/hand_care/hand-arm_conditions/tennis_elbow

http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/tennis_elbow

Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, Sixth Edition.

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