

Patient Information Leaflet

What is Tennis Elbow?

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What is Tennis Elbow?

Tennis elbow is a condition that commonly results in pain around the outside of your elbow joint. This painful area is at a point called your lateral epicondyle (the place at which a group of tendons from your forearm come together and attach to the bone) and so is also known as lateral epicondylitis.

Tennis elbow occurs when there is damage to the tendons that straighten your wrist.

The tendon itself changes in its' structure and is no longer able to withstand the forces that every day life puts upon it. The latest research has shown that the condition is caused not by inflammation but, in fact, by a lack of it.



What are the signs and symptoms of Tennis Elbow?

- **Pain:** Tennis elbow leads to pain on the outside of your elbow. This pain can increase with gripping or rotation of the wrist and forearm e.g. opening a jar or a door. You may experience constant pain which could occur at rest and can affect your sleep. The pain can travel down your arm from your elbow towards your wrist.
- **Weakness:** Weakness in your wrist or reduction in your grip strength.
- **Stiffness:** Tennis elbow can cause stiffness and a general restriction of your movement.
- **Tingling:** Sometimes tingling and numbness can also be experienced.

What can cause Tennis Elbow?

About 5 in 1,000 adults develop tennis elbow each year. It mainly affects people between the ages of 35 and 55.

Women and men are affected equally. Tennis elbow is caused by activities that require repetitive or excessive straightening of the wrist. This can include

Over use activities at home

- Gardening e.g. using shears
- Racquet sports such as tennis or squash
- DIY

Over use activities at work

- Computer work and typing
- Administrative work e.g. filing
- Manual work e.g. labouring, plumbing, plastering or factory work.

Trauma

- Tennis elbow can also occur as the result of a single, forceful injury.

What are the treatment options for tennis elbow?

Modifying your activities

You should try to modify movements and activities that bring on your symptoms as much as possible. Resting from activities that bring on pain can help to reduce pain levels and promote the healing process. Ensuring your work station is set up properly at work can help too. If you play racquet sports then reviewing your technique and possibly your handle can also be helpful. In some people,

simply modifying their activities and reducing repetitive activities can be enough to improve tennis elbow.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy has been shown to be helpful in the treatment of tennis elbow. Studies have shown that physiotherapy may not be any better than a steroid injection at relieving pain in the short-term (within the first six weeks). But, it may be superior to steroid injections in the long-term. Physiotherapy treatment may include many things but here are a few simple exercises you can try which have been proven to improve tennis elbow.

Stretches

Fully straighten your affected arm. Using your other hand, bend your wrist down as far as you can comfortably. You should feel a stretch in your elbow and forearm. This should not be too painful.



How many should I do?

Each stretch should be held for 30 seconds. It is best to do this 'little and often' throughout the day.

Video available on youtube, search for PLYMOUTHNHSPHYSIO/forearm extensor stretch or follow link below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTwTPPBk37g>

Step 1 Eccentric Strengthening



Have your elbow in a straight position and your forearm supported. Have your hand facing down and wrist bent backwards as much as possible.

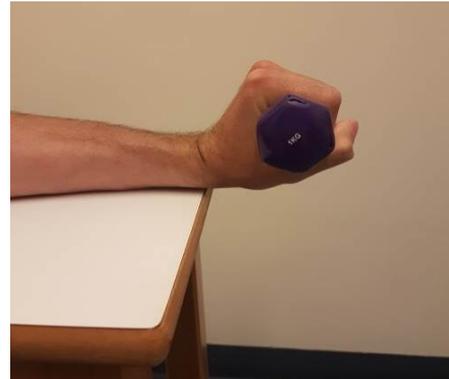
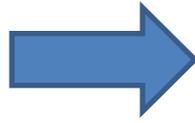
Hold a small weight (a tin of baked beans or even a bottle of water would be suitable).

Slowly lower wrist down as far as possible.

(Counting between 5 - 30 seconds).

If unable to raise your wrist use your opposite hand to raise it up and return to the starting position.

Step 2 Concentric Strengthening



Have your elbow in a straight position and your forearm supported. Have your hand facing down and wrist bent downwards.

Hold a small weight (a tin of baked beans or even a bottle of water would be suitable).

Raise your wrist up as high as possible

Step 3 Isometric Strengthening with a weight



Have your elbow in a straight position and your forearm supported. Have your hand facing down and wrist bent downwards. Hold a small weight (a tin of baked beans or even a bottle of water would be suitable). Hold this position between 10-45 seconds.

Isometric Strengthening without a weight

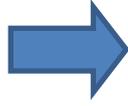
If unable to hold a weight, have your elbow in a straight position and your forearm supported. With your hand facing down and wrist slightly bent backwards. Place opposite hand on top and push downwards, push down and resist with the bottom hand.



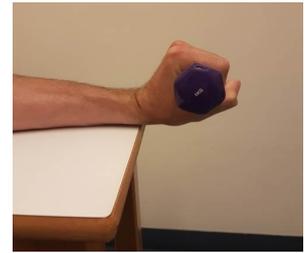
Stage 4: Complete as a circuit



Lift up



Lower Down



Hold

Evidence suggests the completing these exercises in circuit is the most effective way to load tennis elbow.

Complete 3 sets of 15 repetitions of this exercise

One minute rest between each set

When completing these exercises continue even if you experience **mild pain** (approx. **4/10** on the pain scale) but **stop** if it becomes a **disabling pain** (approx. **8/10** on the pain scale). If they are too painful please seek the advice of your physiotherapist.

If you are able to perform this exercise without experiencing minor pain or discomfort, then increase the length of time lowering the weight down, holding the weight or increase the weight you are using.

This can be guided by your individual physiotherapist.



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