

Tennis Elbow

What Is Tennis Elbow?

Tennis elbow is an inflammation around the bony knob on the outer side of the elbow. It occurs when the tissue that attaches muscle to the bone becomes irritated. The bony knob is called the lateral epicondyle, the tennis elbow is also called **lateral epicondylitis** (ep-ih-kon-dah-LY-tis).

Causes

Playing a racket sport can cause tennis elbow. So can doing anything that involves extending your wrist or rotating your forearm - such as twisting a screwdriver or lifting heavy objects with your palm down. With age, the tissue may become inflamed more easily.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of tennis elbow are pain on the outer side of the elbow and down the forearm. You may have pain all the time or only when you lift things. The elbow may also swell, get red, or feel warm to the touch. And it may hurt to grip things, turn your hand, or swing your arm.

Understanding Your Elbow Problem

The muscles that allow you to straighten your fingers, and rotate your lower arm and wrist are called the **extensor muscles**. These muscles extend from the outer side of your elbow to your wrist and fingers. A cordlike fiber called a **tendon** attaches the extensor muscles to the elbow. Overuse or an accident can cause tissue in the tendon to become inflamed or injured.

When The Tendon Is Inflamed

When the tendon is inflamed, the nerves around the tendon become irritated. Then moving your elbow is painful. Turning your hand or grasping objects can also be painful.

Diagnosing Tennis Elbow

Your doctor can usually diagnose tennis elbow from your symptoms and from the look and feel of your elbow. He or she may order an x-ray to be sure the bone is not diseased or fractured. In some cases, other tests may be needed.

Treating Tennis Elbow

Your treatment will depend on how inflamed your tendon is. The goal is to relieve your symptoms and help you regain full use of your elbow.

Rest and Medication

Wearing a tennis elbow splint allows the inflamed tendon to rest, so it can heal. Using your other hand or changing your grip also helps take stress off the tendon. Heat or ice can relieve pain and reduce swelling.

Exercises and Therapy

Your doctor may give you an exercise program to gently stretch and then strengthen the muscles around your elbow.

Preventing a Flare-Up

To prevent a flare-up after treatment, you may need to change the way you do some things. Gripping with the palm up, lifting heavy objects with both hands, or varying activities throughout the day will help reduce stress on the tendon. When you play racket sports or golf, be sure to condition your muscles, do warm-up and cool-down exercise, and use the correct strokes.