

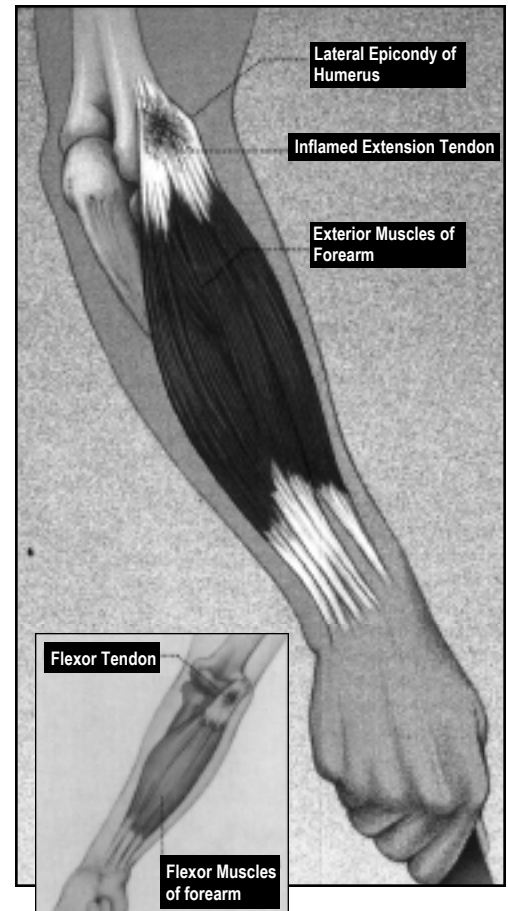
Tennis Elbow/Golfer's Elbow/Tendonitis

The Injury

A condition that plagues many racquet players and golfers (both amateur and professional, tennis elbow consists of damage to the forearm muscles and tendons, and an inflammation of the connective tissue in the elbow area. It is sometimes called tendonitis or epicondylitis and can also occur in anyone who uses frequent repetitive motions of the forearm, wrist, or fingers; for example, a computer operator).

Tennis involves the tendons attached to the muscles that extend (bend back) the wrist and fingers. A small tendon arising from a very small area of bone at the elbow connects to the large extending (extensor) muscles of the forearm. After repetitive use of these extensor muscles, the tendon becomes overworked and inflamed. This produces the pain on the outside of the elbow.

The same thing happens with golfer's elbow except that it involves the tendons that attach to forearm muscles that flex the wrist and fingers (flexors). The pain here is on the *inside* of the elbow.



The Cause

You don't have to play a racket sport to get tennis elbow. You can develop the problem from typing, gardening, bowling, playing baseball, or even tightly gripping a heavy briefcase.

What It Feels Like

At first, you may feel aching or soreness near the outside of your elbow, or on the side of your forearm opposite your palm. If you continue to play, these areas may become tender when you touch them and the pain may travel down to your wrist. You may have problems with everyday activities like shaking hands, picking up a briefcase, or opening a door because the pain is so great. If you feel this type of pain stop the activity, rest your arm and see Dr. Re.

Treatment

Rest. Temporarily, you may have to stop playing golf, tennis, or other racquet sports altogether, but a period of rest is very important. Avoid aggravating the condition by continuing, especially if you experience pain.

Ice. Use an ice bag (or a bag of frozen corn or peas) on your elbow three times per day for 30 to 60 minutes in the early painful stage, and for 15 minutes after active use of your arm.

Stretching. Stretching will help prevent stiffness by breaking down any scar tissue that may result from inflammation (see Exercises).

Physical Therapy. Initially, physical therapists will work to reduce the inflammation in your arm. They can teach you the technique of ice massage. Later, they will teach you how to strengthen your muscles to protect the inflamed area and prevent a repeat of the injury.

Medication. You may receive a prescription for anti-inflammatory/analgesic medication. If necessary, a localized cortisone injection may also be used to relieve the pain and joint tenderness. This can make physical therapy more effective. After a cortisone shot, you shouldn't participate in sports or heavy exercise for about three to five days.

Brace. You may be prescribed any of several braces, supports, or molded casts designed for this problem. A brace supports local structures, thus reducing the pressure on the inflamed tendon. At first, the brace may be worn at all times except when doing gentle exercises to avoid elbow stiffness. Later it will be necessary only for protection during activities using the injured arm.

Surgery. In some cases, surgery may be required.

Rehabilitation for Tennis Elbow

The first step in treating tennis elbow is to rest from the painful activity for four to six weeks. Don't return to the tennis court until you are free of pain. A good rule of thumb is to listen to your body. Rest your elbow as soon as you feel pain.

Icing the injury can help to decrease pain. Apply ice to the painful area in a circular motion for five to seven minutes at least two to three times per day. Freeze some water in a paper cup, peel back the top of the cup, and hold the bottom when icing. Ice the elbow regularly for the first five days. After five days, apply heat with a moist heating pad for fifteen minutes two to three times per day, followed by massage for five minutes to increase circulation.

You may be prescribed a tennis elbow strap to minimize the force to your elbow when you return to play. You wear this strap just below your elbow.

One of the most effective ways to find long-term relief from tennis elbow pain is to learn proper tennis technique—especially a good backhand. Tennis lessons not only will help prevent further injury but will also help improve your game.

Also, have your racket and its grip sized for your strength and style of play by a tennis pro. A mid-sized racket strung between 50 and 55 pounds is optimum for most people.

You can start stretching and strengthening exercises after the five-day icing period. Stretching exercises (Figure 1) increase flexibility of the damaged muscle. Strengthening exercises (Figures 2 through 6) help regain any strength lost during the injury and rest period. Increased strength can also help prevent recurrence.

Another simple strengthening exercise is to squeeze a deflated tennis ball for five to ten minutes two to three times per day. As your arm strengthens and remains pain-free, try an inflated tennis ball. If you feel severe pain during any of these exercises, stop immediately.

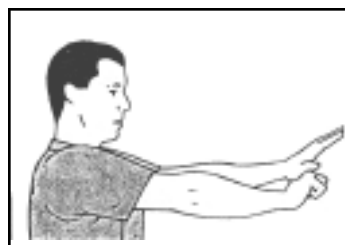


3. Wrist Curls. Sit with your hand over your knee. With palm up (a), and holding a 1- or 2-pound weight, bend wrist up 10 times. Repeat with palm down (b), extending wrist up. Increase to two sets of ten daily, then increase the weight by one pound. Repeat process until you reach five to seven pounds.



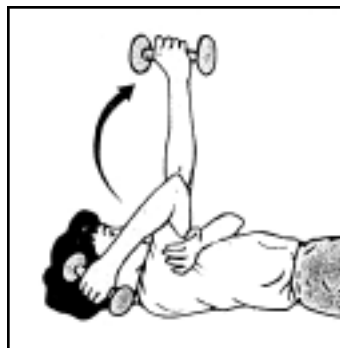
4. Wrist. Tie a 2-lb. weight to the end of a rope. Then attach it to the middle of a broomstick or cane. Grasp the broomstick with your palms down, and slowly lift the weight by bending your wrists up. Then slowly lower the weight back to the ground by bending your wrists down. Do 5 times, gradually increasing to 20. The goal is 20 repetitions of 7 lbs. once or twice per day.

5. Bicep/Forearm This elbow-flexion strengthens your biceps and forearm muscles. Start with your arm at your side, your back straight and your palm facing forward. Bending only your elbow, lift a 1- to 3-lb. weight slowly. Then return to the starting position. Do three sets of 10 repetitions on each arm. If your arm fatigues before the 7th lift, switch to a lighter lift.



1. Forearm Stretch. To stretch your forearm muscles while seated or standing, extend your arm straight in front of you with the palm down. Make a loose fist and use the opposite hand to pull the wrist down. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat five times. Do two to three times per day.

2. Forearm Strength. Hold your arm straight in front of you, palm down. Clench your fingers, bend wrist up, and hold it tight. Using the other hand, try to push the hand down. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat five times. Slowly increase to 20 times, two to three times per day. Follow the same procedure with your elbow bent 90°.



6. Triceps. This elbow extension lift strengthens your triceps muscles in the back of your upper arm. While lying on your back flex your arm with your elbow pointing straight up; hold the back of your upper arm with your opposite hand for support. With a 1- to 3-lb. weight, extend your elbow completely, then slowly return to the starting position. Follow the repetition guidelines in figure 5.