

Tennis Elbow.

What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow, or lateral epicondylitis, is similar to golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis). The main differences between the two are the location of the pain and the activity that leads to the injury (See Figure 1). Both conditions are caused mainly by overuse of the muscles and tendons of the forearm, leading to inflammation and pain around the elbow joint.

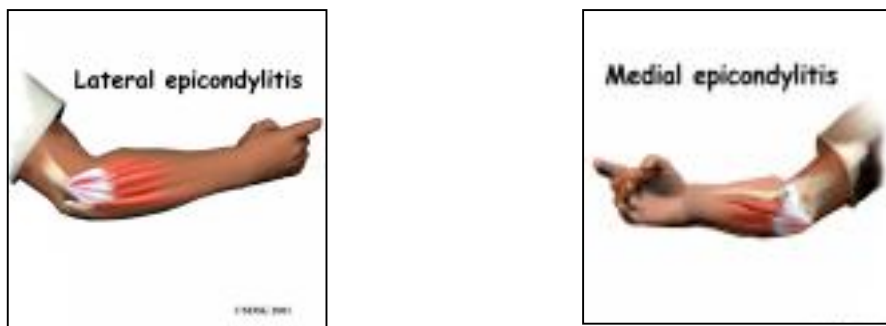


Figure 1: Anatomical Location Tennis & Golfers Elbow.

Tennis elbow is a common injury (more so than golfer's elbow) and got its name because a lot of tennis players developed the associated symptoms. Tennis elbow is thought to be a form of tendonitis, inflammation or degeneration of the tendon, however there are a number of different theories that potentially could explain the reason for a player developing tennis elbow.

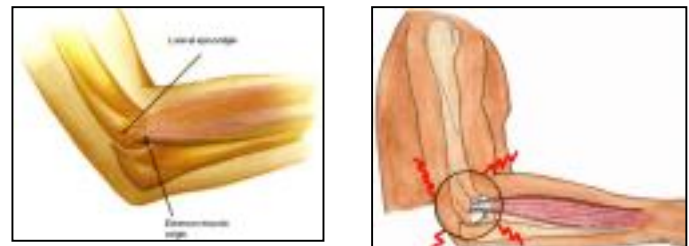


Figure 2: Anatomy of Tendon Attaching to the Bone.

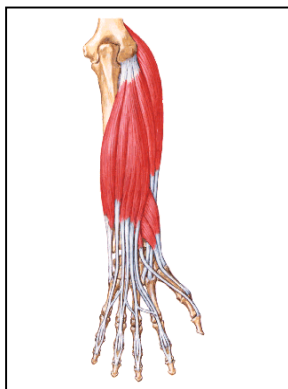


Figure 3: Muscles affected by Tennis Elbow.

Tendons attach muscles to bone (See Figure 2). Because of the forces exerted through muscles, the tendon may become “over worked” and inflamed when a particular activity is repetitive. This is usually at the bony prominence where the tendon attaches to the bone. However, it is now thought that tennis elbow is not simply an inflammation of the tendons around the elbow. Rather, the problem may be a degenerative process, either the result of aging, or repetitive use. An incomplete healing response, in an area that does not have good blood flow and therefore has difficulty accessing nutrition and oxygen necessary for healing, leads to degeneration of the tendon causing small tears and ruptures. The medical name for tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) comes from the name of the bony prominence where the tendon

inserts (the lateral epicondyle) where the inflammation causes the pain. The pain is usually at the elbow joint on the outside of the arm and occasionally a shooting sensation down the forearm is also common while gripping objects (See Figure 3).

What causes tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow may be caused by a traumatic event (such as a fall or collision when playing football), or by a repetitive stress, where an action is performed repeatedly and pain gradually develops. Tennis elbow is most common at the beginning of the tennis season, or when the intensity or duration of a repetitive activity is increased. Tennis is one of the common causes of these symptoms, but many other throwing sports and work-related activities can cause the same problem. Often, tight muscles or joints as well as poor technique can contribute to tennis elbow.

Do football players get tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow is not a common condition in football. Football players are more likely to develop tennis elbow when playing other sports such as tennis or while working!

What are the symptoms of tennis elbow?

The pain associated with tennis elbow usually has a gradual onset, but may come on suddenly after a fall while playing football. The player will notice pain on the bone (lateral epicondyle) on the outside of the elbow (See Figure 3) and weakness in the wrist. The player will also have pain on the outside of the elbow when the wrist is bent back and pain on the outside of the elbow when trying to straighten the fingers against resistance. If the player pushes on the outside of their elbow they will feel a sharp pain on the bony part of the elbow. The pain on the outside of the elbow can also be worsened by grasping and gripping objects, such as shopping bags (See Figure 4).



Figure 4: Carrying a Bag.

What can the player do?

Icing the injury and resting from any activity that causes pain is advised. Rest is an important component in the healing of this injury. Stretching the wrist can also help lengthen any stiff or tight muscles (See Figure 5). Tennis elbow may heal quickly, but often a player could suffer with this problem for a long time. When the symptoms have settled down, it is essential that the elbow is fully rehabilitated and strengthened to help avoid the injury in the future. Seeing a physiotherapist or sports doctor is very important.

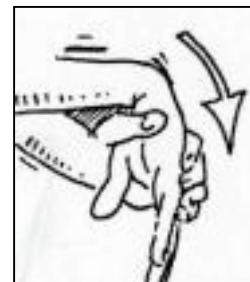


Figure 5: Wrist Flexion Stretch.

What can a sports injury professional do?

A sports doctor or physiotherapist will examine the elbow and design the best management plan. Initially, a sports doctor may prescribe anti-inflammatory medication. A physiotherapist could apply ultrasound, acupuncture, the use sports massage techniques and give advice on rehabilitation. This may include stretches, strengthening exercises and advise on modification of technique - either at work or in sport. Sometimes, a sports injury professional will advise the wearing of a brace or support to protect the tendon whilst healing and strengthening (See Figure 6). If the symptoms persist a sports doctor may inject the tendon with steroid to help with the pain and inflammation.



Figure 6: Tennis Elbow Support.