

Self Help for Tennis Elbow

Information for patients

What is a tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow is a common condition that causes pain on the outer side of the elbow. It occurs due a strain on the tendons that attach the muscles of the wrist and fingers to the bone on the outside of the elbow.

Contributing factors

- Poor posture
- Overuse or repeated movements of the forearm and wrist
- An unusual increase or change in your activity

When to seek medical attention

- A new lump or bump around the elbow
- Bruising or redness in and around the joint or new multiple joint swellings
- Feeling unwell with a temperature associated with the onset of this problem
- Loss of feeling and power in the arm
- Sudden onset of pain after injury

Symptoms

Pain on the outside of the elbow associated with gripping or twisting movements. Repeated movements such as DIY or computer mouse work can often cause aggravation. The outside of your elbow may be very tender to touch and you may notice some pain travelling down the forearm

What to expect

The majority of tennis elbow related pain will settle within a few weeks or months with the correct changes to activity. If your symptoms persist, then the first line of treatment is physiotherapy, where you will be assessed and given specific instructions and exercises to help your condition. A very small number of people may require more invasive treatment such as an injection or surgery if their symptoms do not respond to the other treatments.

Management

- Avoid heavy lifting, forceful gripping or twisting actions that may aggravate symptoms
- If lifting a heavy object, do so with your elbow bent and your palm upwards, to reduce strain
- If you are involved in an activity using repetitive movements, such as a keyboard or mouse work, or if your profession requires repetitive manual handling activities, have a look at your workstation and work activities and consider how you could adjust these to avoid undue stress on your wrist and forearm. You may need to talk to your employer

- Using an epicondylitis clasp may be helpful. These can be worn on your forearm to reduce stress and should be available at your chemist
- Adequately control your pain, as pain can stop the muscles working properly and can make this condition last longer. Speak to your pharmacist if you are unsure which medication may help
- You could apply heat or ice to help with the pain and healing. Ensure that you do not apply these directly to the skin. Also do not use them too frequently or for prolonged periods of time (up to 20 minutes), as these treatments can burn the skin
- Try to maintain a good posture

Exercises

Demonstration	Instructions
	<p>Sit with good posture of neck, upper back and shoulder, breathing normally. Start with your affected forearm rested on a surface and have your thumb facing upwards. Relax your hand and your thumb in this position.</p> <p>Place your unaffected hand over your affected hand and gently push the back of your affected hand against your unaffected hand to stop you bending your wrist backwards.</p> <p>This should be a low effort exercise that is entirely tolerable.</p> <p>You should aim to hold this position for up to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times, three times a day as tolerated.</p>
	<p>Stand or sit with your affected elbow straight and your wrist bent. Gently use your unaffected arm to assist the stretch as tolerated.</p> <p>Aim to hold this position for 15 seconds and repeat five times, two to three times a day as tolerated.</p> <p>If this stretch gives you any numb or tingling feelings down the arm, you should stop.</p>

	<p>Sit with good posture of your neck, upper back and shoulder. Rest your affected forearm on a table with your wrist over the edge. Slowly bend your wrist upwards without raising your arm off the table.</p> <p>Try to keep your hand in the middle of your wrist as you rise upwards.</p> <p>Move as far as tolerated or able. Hold for five seconds and lower down in the same way. Try to do this very slowly.</p> <p>Aim to repeat this exercise 10-15 times, two to three times a day as tolerated.</p>
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Frequently asked questions

When can I return to sport?

You may return to sport when you can perform the range of movements and strength required for your sport.

What can I do if my symptoms do not settle?

If your symptoms have not settled after four to six weeks, you should consider referring yourself to your local physiotherapy department. Physiotherapy self-referral forms are available at your GP reception. Complete the form and return to the reception desk. You will either receive a telephone call or a letter for you to arrange an appointment with the physiotherapist.

This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

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