

Tennis Elbow

The elbow joint is surrounded by muscles that move the elbow, the wrist and the fingers. The tendons are where the muscles attach to the bone. Tennis elbow is due to pain coming from the tendons and muscles that attach to the outside of the elbow and lift the hand backwards. Pain is normally felt over the outside of the elbow and sometimes down the forearm to the wrist.

What Causes the Pain?

Tennis elbow can be caused by putting too much load through the tendons at the elbow. This can cause small tears to the tendon, which can weaken the tendon. The pain often comes on gradually, but can come on suddenly often due to a change in activity loading. Anyone can develop tennis elbow, but it normally occurs in people between the ages of 40 to 60 years old. Sometimes there is no obvious cause and only a small number of people develop tennis elbow as a result of playing tennis.

What are the Main Symptoms of Tennis Elbow?

- Pain when pressing over the outside of the elbow.
- Pain when lifting or bending the arm such as lifting a kettle.
- Pain when writing, typing or gripping small objects like a pen.
- Pain when twisting the forearm when doing activities like opening a door or jar.
- Pain and stiffness when fully straightening the elbow.

How long will it take to get better?

Tennis elbow can last between 6 months and 2 years. Most people recover in a year.

How Can I Help Myself?

Using the elbow will not cause damage, although it is best to try and change the way you are using it. Resting the elbow from the activities that cause pain may help.

Placing ice over the painful area by using a small bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea towel for 20 minutes 3 to 4 times a day.

Changing your workstation or the tools you are using may help to improve your pain. E.G. a thumb mouse for computer work. Keep equipment close to your body so that you can reduce the load that your elbow has to deal with.

Try to lift objects with your palms facing upwards and the elbow bent. Avoid gripping objects between your thumb and first finger.

Wear a tennis elbow support or strap. Elbow supports do not need to be worn all the time, but can help when carrying out tasks that cause your symptoms.

Sometimes wearing a wrist splint can help reduce pain.

Rehab Therapy Treatment

Generally tennis elbow is a condition that improves with time. However, strengthening exercises can help to improve the pain around the elbow.

Other Treatments

Steroid Injections

Steroid injections are no longer recommended for tennis elbow pain. Studies suggest that the injections often reduce pain for a few weeks, but the pain often returns and can be worse than before the injection. Over a 1 to 2 year period it has been shown that patients that have had steroid injections tend to have a worse outcome than those who have had no treatment at all.

Surgery

Very few people need to have surgery for tennis elbow. This would only be considered if no treatment has helped with the pain and it seen as the only option.