TENNIS ELBOW

WHAT IS TENNIS ELBOW?

Tennis elbow, or Lateral Epicondylitis, is a common overuse injury causing pain on the outer elbow and weakness in the wrist when lifting and twisting. It results from inflammation of the extensor tendons due to repetitive activities like gripping or computer work. The wrist extensors attach to the lateral epicondyle and can become damaged from excessive tension during contraction. Symptoms typically arise gradually from overuse but can also result from direct trauma to the wrist extensors.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of this condition usually develop gradually, starting as an ache after an unaccustomed or aggravating activity, often felt most in the morning. Pain is typically localized 1-2 cm below the bony bump on the outer elbow (lateral epicondyle) and may radiate into the forearm. In mild cases, discomfort is minimal, while severe cases can cause sharp, debilitating pain, even at night. Some patients also report neck or upper back pain, muscle weakness, and reduced grip strength. Everyday tasks like gripping, lifting, or turning objects can aggravate symptoms. Elbow stiffness, especially in the morning, is also common.

CAUSES

Tennis elbow can affect non-players more than players and arises from repeated wrist extension against resistance. Activities like tennis, squash, carpentry, and computer work can contribute. The condition often develops after a sudden increase in stress on forearm muscles or due to changes in technique or equipment. It may also occur suddenly from heavy lifting or gripping forces. Previous injuries to the wrist, elbow, shoulder, or neck can increase risk.

PROGNOSIS

With appropriate management, most minor cases of tennis elbow that have not been present for long can usually recover within a few weeks. In more severe and chronic cases recovery can be a lengthy process and may take up to 6 months in those who have had their condition for a long period of time. Early physiotherapy intervention is therefore vital to hasten recovery.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

• excessive or altered activity

• poor sporting technique or equipment

• muscle weakness/tightness

• joint tightness (particularly the wrist, elbow, neck or upper back)

• poor posture

• inadequate warm-up

• inadequate rehabilitation following a previous elbow injury

• a history of a neck or upper back injury

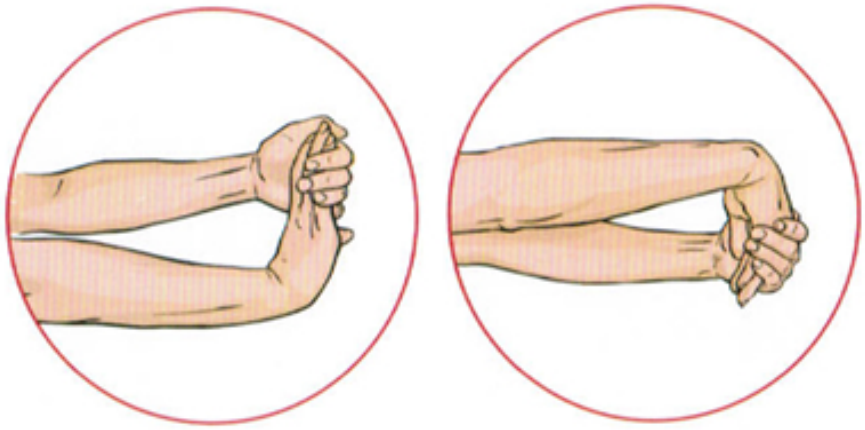
• a history of injury to the nerves that supply the elbow

TREATMENT

- Shock Wave Therapy
- soft tissue massage
- dry needling
- taping
- electrotherapy
- the use of a tennis elbow brace
- joint mobilization
- ice or heat treatment
- progressive exercises to improve flexibility, strength and posture
- training and activity modification advice and education
- anti-inflammatory advice
- devising and monitoring an appropriate return to sport or activity plan

EXERCISES

These exercises are commonly recommended for this condition, but you should consult your physiotherapist before starting. They're usually done 2-3 times daily, as long as they don't cause or worsen symptoms. Your physiotherapist will guide you on when to begin and how to progress through the exercise levels safely.



Keeping elbow straight, grasp effected hand and slowly bend wrist as shown in the above picture '1' until a stretch is felt.

Hold 15 seconds, relax and then repeat a second time.

Complete the above stretches 2-3 times daily