



Pain in the Elbow

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Have you ever finished a long work day or painting the house and feel a pain on the outside of your elbow? You may be possibly feeling the effects of a condition called lateral epicondylitis. Lateral epicondylitis otherwise, known as “Tennis Elbow,” is one of the many overuse injuries that can affect your elbow. Lateral epicondylitis affects between 1 and 3 percent of the population and occurs frequently between the ages of 35 and 50 years of age.

The pain of tennis elbow occurs where the tendons of the wrist extensor muscles attach to bony prominence on the outside of the elbow (lateral epicondyle). At times the pain can radiate down the forearm into the wrist. The signs and symptoms can include:

1. Pain when you extend your wrist
2. Pain that radiates from the outside of your elbow into the forearm and wrist
3. Weakness in the wrist leading to difficulty performing simple tasks such as opening a door handle or shaking hands with someone
4. A weak grip
5. Pain when you bump or press the outside of your elbow

The main cause of lateral epicondylitis is overuse of the forearm muscles used to straighten and bend your wrist. With repeated motions of an aggravating activity, inflammation, pain and/or series of tiny tears can arise in the tendon of the forearm muscles. Those activities include playing tennis, using a screwdriver, hammering, painting, weaving, raking and many more.

If left untreated, lateral epicondylitis can become chronic and pose a challenge with work duties as well as lifting or gripping objects. Receiving treatment from a physical therapist can help minimize and even eliminate your pain. Those treatments include:

1. Rest, and ice as well as the use of anti-inflammatory medications such as Ibuprofen, Naproxen (as directed by your doctor).
2. Exercises to help stretch and then strengthen the forearm muscles
3. Iontophoresis with dexamethasone (a low dose and safe steroid) and ultrasound to help decrease the inflammation
4. Manual therapy treatments such as myofascial release and/or transverse friction techniques across the tendon

Once the symptoms have been eliminated, prevention is the key for positive, long-term outcomes. To prevent future flare-ups, always play with the correct, sport-specific technique, use a brace to eliminate stress in the forearm muscles, keep your strength up, keep your wrist straight or neutral position, warm up properly, and ice after heavy use.