

Elbow Tendonitis

Lateral epicondylitis, commonly known as tennis elbow, is a painful condition on the outside of the elbow. Its namesake is the backhand stroke in tennis, which causes repetitive stress on the wrist extensor and supinator muscles. Medial epicondylitis, also known as golfers or little league elbow, is a very similar condition of the wrist flexors and pronators at the inside of the elbow. The premature throwing of curveballs among junior baseball pitchers may lead to medial epicondylitis. Despite their common names, both medial and lateral epicondylitis may develop in response to any repetitive activity. Over time, inflammation (tendonitis) develops over the tendon that connects the muscles to the arm bone (humerus).

Pain located on the outside of the elbow is the main symptom associated with lateral epicondylitis. Stiffness and soreness may extend into the forearm and/or hand. The discomfort is usually increased with grasping or holding objects (especially when the elbow is in a straightened position). Turning the palm or wrist upward tends to irritate tennis elbow while turning the palm or wrist downward increases the symptoms of golfers/little league elbow.

Constant pain in the elbow, pain affecting both elbows simultaneously, or pain associated with numbness or tingling may indicate a more serious medical problem that should be evaluated by a physician.

Treatment for tennis elbow rarely requires surgery. A physician may recommend rest, ice, and/or anti-inflammatory medications to settle down the symptoms. Physical therapy, including massage, stretching and strengthening exercise, ultrasound, and/or various forms of electrical stimulation may be also prescribed. Elbow straps are generally inexpensive and may also help relieve symptoms. Steroid injections, though more invasive, may help decrease pain in advanced cases of tennis elbow. The recovery period varies depending on the severity. The longer tendonitis lingers, generally the longer it takes to resolve.

The above is intended as general information only. Be sure to contact your physician for advice on your own specific medical problems.