

Lateral Epicondylitis

Description of Injury :

Lateral Epicondylitis – General Information

Lateral epicondylitis or tennis elbow, is a painful condition that affects the outer side of the elbow. On the outer aspect of the elbow, there is a bony bump called the epicondyle, part of the humerus. This is the attachment site for the group of muscles that extend the wrist. Pain at this site is often seen in those that play tennis because of the repetitive nature of the sport. Swinging a racquet utilizes these muscles and pulls at the attachment site on the bone creating inflammation and pain. This condition can be caused by any repetitive activity utilizing the wrist and is not limited to racquet sports (painting, carrying heavy items, carpentry, typing, knitting, repetitive factory work). The onset of the pain may also occur with a sudden forceful stress causing a strain to this muscle group.

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Pain on the outer aspect of your elbow, which may be felt along the forearm, especially when the wrist is extended
- Pain or weakness when you make a fist
- Pain or weakness when you lift objects

Making the Diagnosis

Lateral epicondylitis is made after a detailed evaluation by a healthcare provider. X-rays may be taken as needed to rule out a fractured bone in order to make your diagnosis.

Treatment

Treatment options include:

- During the initial treatment stage, you may need to avoid activities that cause your pain
- Applying ice to the elbow will help to reduce the pain. Apply the ice packs for 15 minutes every 2-4 hours until the pain has subsided
- Performing ice massage to the painful region for 5 to 10 minutes, multiple times per day will provide additional pain relief
- Elevate the elbow above your heart when you are sitting or lying down to help reduce swelling. You may also wrap the elbow with an elastic bandage to apply compression and reduce swelling
- Acetaminophen may be taken to reduce the amount of pain. Ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory medications may be taken at the discretion of your physician
- Rehabilitation exercises are effective at treating this condition by helping to strengthen your wrist and forearm
- Forearm straps are designed to reduce some of the stress on the attachment site of the muscle. These should be worn just below the painful area on the elbow
- Your doctor may consider an injection to help relieve your symptoms if you do not respond to conservative treatments
- For severe cases that do not respond to the above therapies, surgery may be recommended

Recovery Timeline

The recovery timeline will depend on multiple factors. The severity of your injury, your age, overall health, and whether or not you have injured your elbow before will all have an impact. An acute injury (pain for only a couple weeks) will generally resolve within 2-6 weeks. A chronic injury, however, may take several months to resolve.

Return to Regular Activities

The recovery time will vary between individuals. Return to your regular activity or sport can happen safely when your elbow has fully recovered. If you return too soon, full recovery may be delayed and you may cause further damage or worsen your injury.

Generally, you may safely return to your activities when you have accomplished the following:

- You have achieved pain-free, full range of motion with the injured wrist and elbow
- You have regained full strength in the injured arm and wrist. If the strength equals the uninjured arm and wrist, this represents a good indicator your strength has returned to normal.

Please consult your healthcare provider prior to returning to your regular activity or sport.

Prevention Strategies

This injury occurs as a result of overusing the muscles that extend your wrist. Avoiding or limiting these activities may help to prevent this condition from occurring. The exercises within this application may help to improve range of motion and strengthen your wrist and arm muscles, which can both help to treat and prevent this problem from

recurring.

Ensure you take the time to properly warm up and stretch before participating in your sport or activity. Proper technique may also help to prevent this injury from occurring. A change in your grip or equipment may be needed. Consult a certified teaching professional with knowledge in this injury to see whether your technique is putting you at risk.

In addition, you may want to try a forearm wrist strap as this may help to reduce the stress at the elbow and allow you to continue to participate in sport.