

# Tennis & Golfer's Elbow

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## Important Facts

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) and golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis) are common. About 3% of people get these conditions during their adult life. They don't just happen to tennis players and golfers. Any activity that repeatedly stresses the forearm muscles can cause symptoms.

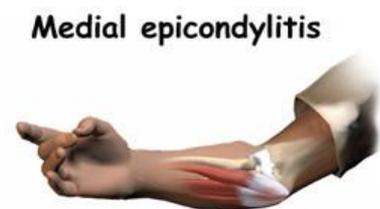
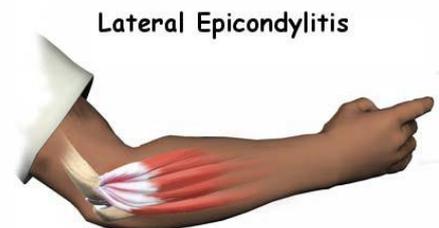
In an acute injury the body undergoes an inflammatory response. Special inflammatory cells make their way to the injured tissues to help them heal. However, tennis elbow does not normally involve inflammation. The problem is within the cells of the tendon. Instead of inflammatory cells, the body produces types of cells called fibroblasts. When this happens, the collagen in the tendon loses its strength. It becomes fragile and is easily injured. The body responds by forming scar tissue in the tendon. For recovery, scar tissue needs to be moved and stretched to allow it to build up strength and resilience.

No-one really knows exactly what causes tendonosis but with proper management it does recover and it is an inconvenience, not a serious condition. The natural history of tennis and golfer's elbow is that they are self-limiting conditions which normally last a few months but can persist. 45% of people will be better in 6 months, 40-50% of people have intermittent symptoms and 5-10 % have persistent pain.

Acute pain will generally improve within a few days or weeks, but aches and niggling pain last longer. This prolonged pain does not indicate that there is a serious problem.

The important thing is to keep moving and using the arm, but to avoid activities that aggravate the problem, such as forceful, repetitive activities with your hand. Just as a runner would train slowly for a marathon, a sensible habit is to start new activities slowly and build gradually, as this allows the muscles and tendons to adapt and strengthen to respond to the new demand.

It helps to stay at work or get back to work as soon as possible, even if you have some pain. **Your elbow will usually not get any worse at work than it will at home.** If you have a heavy, manual job, then you may need some help or modification to your workload initially, but generally all that's needed are some simple changes. Talk to your line manager and ask for help to modify your job while the problem heals



### Warning signs

If you have severe pain that does not improve or even gets worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with your arm pain, then you should consult your doctor.

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## Recovery

### Management tips

- ◆ **Tennis and golfer's elbow are not serious**
- ◆ Acute symptoms usually settle within a few days to a few weeks so that you can get on with your life.
- ◆ **The people who recover fastest from all musculoskeletal problems are those who stay active, exercise and get on with their lives despite pain and stiffness.**
- ◆ Topical NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are helpful in the short term (up to 4 weeks)
- ◆ Ice treatment may help if the pain is from an acute injury. ◆

Acupuncture gives short term pain relief

- ◆ Massage techniques such as deep transverse frictions can induce local analgesia and may help in the healing process, but there is insufficient evidence for this treatment
- ◆ Manipulation and taping have been shown to give short term relief allowing you to exercise and resume normal activities faster
- ◆ Electrotherapy treatments such as laser and shockwave therapy have NOT been shown to help
- ◆ Corticosteroid injections give short term relief but there is a high recurrence rate so it is not a treatment of choice. The benefit of surgery is not known

### Exercise is very important in your recovery

- ◆ To help the healing process so that the tendon heals with strong new collagen
- ◆ To restore your normal mobility
- ◆ To restore full strength to your wrist and forearm muscles
- ◆ To get you doing all your normal activities at home and at work as the condition improves
- ◆ Your physiotherapist will advise you on the correct exercises