



TENNIS ELBOW [LATERAL ELBOW TENDINOPATHY]

ABOUT

Commonly known as Tennis Elbow, this condition has many names including Lateral Epicondylitis, Lateral Epicondylalgia and Lateral Elbow Tendinopathy. It is a condition that affects the tendons that attach to the outside of your elbow (lateral epicondyle). It most commonly affects the Extensor Carpi Radialis Brevis (ECRB) tendon, but may affect one of the other tendons that attaches at this point.

Although playing tennis (hence "Tennis Elbow") is one activity that may cause this condition, there are many ways it may occur. Usually, it involves overuse of the forearm in a repetitive manner. This may be from a few days of unusual use of the forearm for you (lots of weeding/digging over a weekend), or it may be accumulative over a period of many months or even years. Less commonly, the condition may occur from a direct blow to the area.

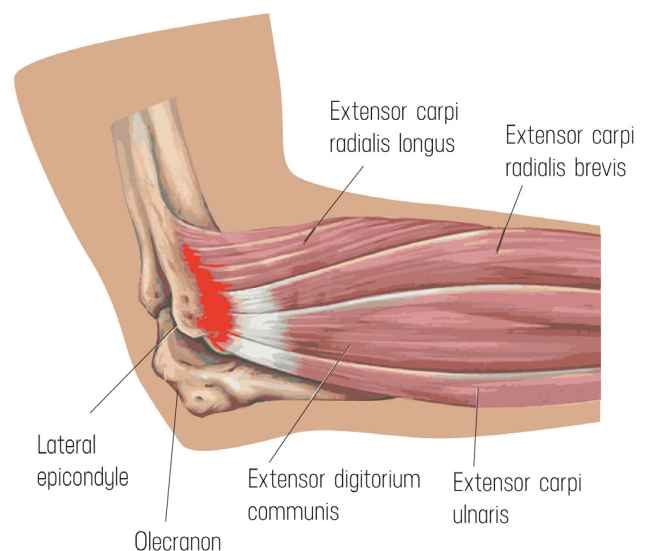
When you have this condition, changes take place in the structure of your injured tendon, making it weaker and more susceptible to injury. While it may be appropriate to give relative rest to your injured tendon early on, more recent studies suggest it is important to gradually apply load to the tendons (in the form of exercise), to prevent further weakening and allow tendon remodeling to take place. A therapist can assist you with this, as well as other therapeutic treatment outlined below.

SYMPTOMS

The most common symptom of Lateral Elbow Tendinopathy is pain where the extensor muscles attach to the outside of your elbow (lateral epicondyle). This pain may radiate both into your lower arm muscles as well as, occasionally, into your upper arm, middle and ring fingers. The pain is usually most severe in positions where your elbow is straight and you are grasping larger objects with your palm facing the ground.

Other conditions may cause similar symptoms and there is a spectrum of severity when it comes to Lateral Elbow Tendinopathy, so it is important that you are properly assessed to make sure any exercises are appropriate to your condition.

LATERAL EPICONDYLITIS [Tennis Elbow]



HOW HAND THERAPY CAN HELP

The good news is that therapists are trained to help you recover from this condition. Some techniques used may include a carefully graded exercise and stretching programme as well as assistance with splinting/taping as appropriate, activity modification and soft tissue treatment.

EXERCISE/STRETCHES: Your therapist can work closely with you to tailor a programme to your condition (during treatment sessions and as a home exercise programme), which allows your tendon to gradually recover and build up strength without exacerbating the condition. This is a key component in your recovery, as learning these skills will enable you to gradually increase your own exercise regime and manage your maintenance programme to limit the likelihood of the condition returning in the future.

SPLINTING/TAPING: It may be appropriate to have a period of time resting your injured tendons through use of either splinting or taping. Splinting may include a counter-force brace, which helps to transfer force away from the injured area of the tendon, or an orthosis which supports your wrist allowing your forearm muscles to be unloaded. Taping may occur in isolation or as part of weaning from an orthosis in order to continue to allow extra support for the injured area.

EDUCATION/ACTIVITY MODIFICATION: Education is a key component of this condition as it is important that you understand the condition and what you can do at home to help support your recovery. Therapists can assist you in finding ways to do activities differently (such as limiting activities carried out with your elbow straight, palm facing down and gripping objects) to allow your injured tendons to rest, as well as suggesting ways to help limit the condition returning in the future.

SOFT TISSUE TREATMENT: Massage and release of myofascial trigger points (sore knots in the muscle and surrounding tissue) in the area of your forearm, combined with the above techniques, may assist in relieving some of the symptoms of your condition. You may also be taught techniques to manage this at home.

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