

Tennis Elbow

Tennis elbow isn't limited to tennis players. Any repetitive use of the arm and wrist, such as bowling, raking, cooking, or driving, can cause tennis elbow. It isn't the elbow itself that's injured. Repetitive use has caused tiny tears in the forearm muscles that run from the elbow to the wrist and in the tendon that attaches the muscles to the outer elbow.

What does tennis elbow feel like?

It begins as soreness, usually a little below the elbow on the outside of the arm. If you keep using the arm, the sore area becomes tender to the touch, and pain may spread down to your wrist. Lifting anything, especially with the arm stretched out is very painful, and lifting something heavy is out of the question.

What can I do for tennis elbow?

Stop the activity right away and don't start up again until the pain is completely gone. This may take several weeks, but rest is the best treatment. A rigid wrist brace, available in many stores, may help you rest the injured muscles. Use the sore arm as little as possible. Give it time to fully heal.

To help relieve the pain, apply ice to the sore area for 5 – 10 minutes at least twice a day. Do this for several days. Then switch to moist heat, such as a towel wet with hot water, for about 10 minutes at least twice a day. Massaging the area may also increase circulation in the damaged muscles. Taking an anti-inflammatory reduces the pain and swelling in the muscles and tendons. Slowly and gently start doing stretching exercises.

To avoid future problems, start performing strengthening exercises to increase flexibility and endurance in the injured muscles. Do not do the exercises if they cause pain. Do these exercises even after you are feeling back to normal.

A tennis elbow strap, worn just below the elbow, helps protect the muscles when you return to work or play.

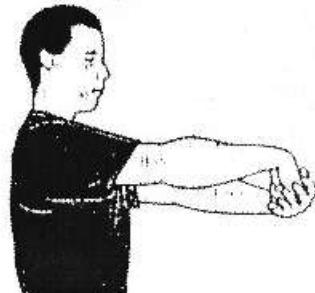


Figure 1. Stretching exercise.
Straighten bad arm with palm down. Make a loose fist, and hold. With opposite hand, try to pull first bad hand downward. Hold 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 5 times. Do this 2 – 3 times a day.

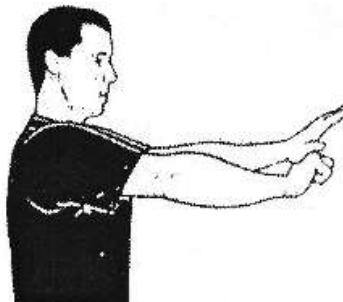


Figure 2. Strengthening Exercise. Straighten bad arm with palm down, make a firm fist. Bend fist upward and hold. With the opposite hand, try to push the first hand downward. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 5 times. Gradually work up to 20 times a day. Do this 2 – 3 times a day.