

Tennis & Golfers Elbow

Important facts I

Tennis elbow (Lateral Epicondylitis) and Golfers 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 normally does not involve inflammation. The problem is within the cells of the tendon. Instead of inflammatory cells, the body produces a type 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 tendonitis but with proper management it does recover and it is an inconvenience, not a serious condition. The natural history of tennis and golfers elbow is that they are self-limiting conditions that 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 your aches and niggling pain lasts 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 to 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.

Lateral Epicondylitis



Medial epicondylitis



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.