

# Tennis Elbow

Muscles connect to bones by thick, fibrous cords (tendons). When the muscles are overused by repeated motion, the tendons may become inflamed and painful. This condition is called tendonitis.

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) is a form of tendonitis. It occurs when the forearm muscles are used again and again in a twisting motion. Pain from tennis elbow occurs mainly on the outside of the elbow. But the pain can spread into the forearm and wrist. Your elbow may also be swollen and tender to the touch.

The pain may get worse when you move your arm or do simple activities. Bending your wrist back, shaking hands, or turning a doorknob may cause pain. The pain often gets worse after several weeks or months. Sometimes you may feel pain when your arm is still.

Tennis players who use a backhand stroke with poor technique are more likely to get tennis elbow. But playing tennis is only one cause of tennis elbow. Other common activities that can cause it include:

- Hammering
- Painting
- Raking

Besides tennis players, people at risk include carpenters, gardeners, musicians, and dentists. Sometimes people get tennis elbow without doing anything that would cause the injury.

Treatment includes resting the arm and taking anti-inflammatory medicines. Special splints help ease symptoms. Symptoms should get better after 4 to 6 weeks of rest. You may need steroid injections if resting and using a splint don't help. After the pain is relieved, you should change your activities so the symptoms don't return. You may need physical therapy. It may include stretching, range-of-motion, and strengthening exercises. These treatments help most cases. You may need surgery if your symptoms continue for 6 months.

## Home care

Follow these guidelines when caring for yourself at home:

- Rest your elbow as needed. Protect it from movement that causes pain. You may be told to use a forearm splint at night to ease symptoms in the morning. Your health care provider may recommend a special wrap or splint to compress the muscles of the forearm. This can ease pain during daytime activities. As your symptoms get better, start to move your elbow more.
- Put an ice pack on the injured area. Do this for 20 minutes every 1 to 2 hours the first day for pain relief. You can make an ice pack by wrapping a plastic bag of ice cubes in a thin towel. Continue using the ice pack 3 to 4 times a day for the next 2 days. Then use the ice pack as needed to ease pain and swelling.
- You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic liver or kidney disease, talk with your health care provider before using these medicines. Also talk with your provider if you've had a stomach ulcer or GI bleeding.
- After your elbow heals, avoid the motion that caused your pain. Or learn to move in a way that causes less stress on the tendon. Using a forearm wrap may keep tennis elbow from happening again.

- A tennis elbow strap may ease pain and keep you from further injury when you start playing tennis again. You can also lower your risk for injury by warming up before you play and cooling down afterward. You should also use the right equipment. For instance, make sure your racquet has the right grip and is the right size for you.

## **Follow-up care**

Follow up with your health care provider, or as advised, if your symptoms don't get better after 1 week of treatment.

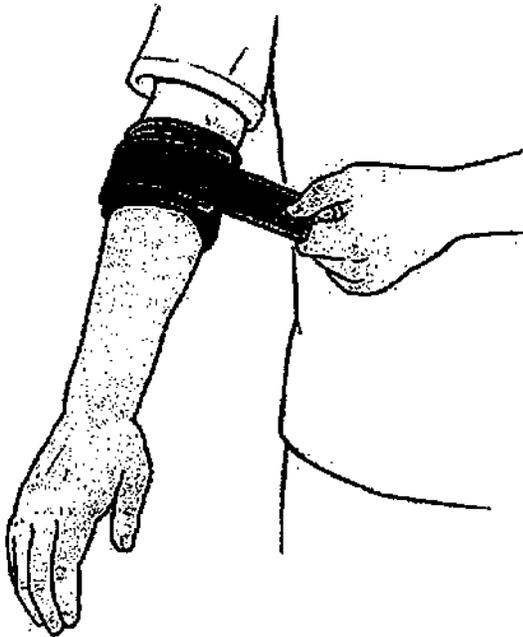
## **When to seek medical advice**

Call your health care provider right away if any of these occur:

- Redness over the painful area
- Pain or swelling at the elbow gets worse
- Any numbness or tingling in your arm, hands, or fingers
- Unexplained fever over 101°F (37.8°C)

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# Treating Tennis Elbow



Your treatment will depend on how inflamed your tendon is. The goal is to relieve your symptoms and help you regain full use of your elbow.

## Rest and medicine

Wearing a tennis elbow splint allows the inflamed tendon to rest. It must be worn properly. It should be placed down the arm past the painful area of the elbow. If it is directly over the inflamed tendon, it can worsen the symptoms. This brace can help the tendon heal. Using your other hand or changing your grip also takes stress off the tendon. Oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) and ice can relieve pain and reduce swelling.

## Exercises and therapy

Your healthcare provider may give you an exercise program. He or she may refer you to a physical therapist. The physical therapist will teach you how to gently stretch and strengthen the muscles around your elbow.

## Anti-inflammatory injections

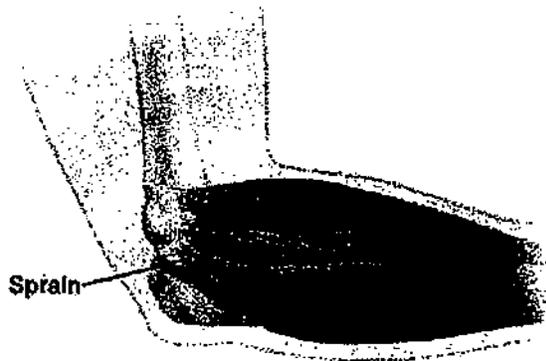
Your healthcare provider may give you injections of an anti-inflammatory medicine, such as cortisone. This helps reduce swelling. You may have more pain at first. But in a few days, your elbow should feel better.

## If surgery is needed

If your symptoms persist for a long time, or other treatments don't work, your healthcare provider may recommend surgery. Surgery repairs the inflamed tendon.

**Date Last Reviewed:** 1/1/2018

# Elbow Sprain



A sprain is a tearing of the ligaments that hold a joint together. This may take up to 6 weeks to fully heal, depending on how severe it is. Moderate to severe sprains are treated with a sling or splint. Minor sprains can be treated without any special support.

## Home care

The following guidelines will help you care for your injury at home:

- Keep your arm elevated to reduce pain and swelling. When sitting or lying down keep your arm above the level of your heart. You can do this by placing your arm on a pillow that rests on your chest or on a pillow at your side. This is most important during the first 2 days (48 hours) after injury.
- Put an ice pack on the injured area. Do this for 20 minutes every 1 to 2 hours the first day. You can make an ice pack by wrapping a plastic bag of ice cubes in a thin towel. Continue using the ice pack 3 to 4 times a day for the next 2 days. Then use the ice pack as needed to ease pain and swelling.
- If you were given a plaster or fiberglass splint, leave it on as advised, or until you see your health care provider. Keep it dry at all times. Bathe with your splint out of the water. Protect it with a large plastic bag, rubber-banded at the top end. If a fiberglass splint gets wet, you can dry it with a hair dryer. Once the splint is removed, move your elbow through its full range of motion several times a day. This will prevent stiffness.
- If you were given a sling only, begin gradual range-of-motion exercises after the first few days, unless told otherwise. This will prevent stiffness in the elbow. Stop wearing the sling once the pain is better.
- You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic liver or kidney disease, talk with your health care provider before using these medicines. Also talk with your provider if you've had a stomach ulcer or GI bleeding.

## Follow-up care

Follow up with your doctor as directed.

Any X-rays you had today don't show any broken bones, breaks, or fractures. Sometimes fractures don't show up on the first X-ray. Bruises and sprains can sometimes hurt as much as a fracture.

These injuries can take time to heal completely. If your symptoms don't improve or they get worse, talk with your health care provider. You may need a repeat X-ray.

## **When to seek medical advice**

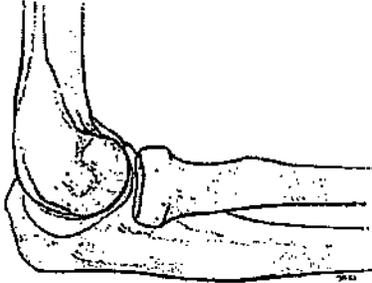
Call your health care provider right away if any of these occur:

- The plaster splint becomes wet or soft
- The fiberglass splint remains wet for more than 24 hours
- Bad odor from the cast or wound fluid stains the cast
- Splint cracks
- Tightness or pain in the elbow gets worse
- Fingers become swollen, cold, blue, numb, or tingly
- You are less able to move hand or fingers
- Area around splint becomes red
- Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, or as directed by your health care provider

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# Elbow Dislocation

An elbow dislocation may occur after a fall onto an outstretched arm or in a car accident. When the hand hits a hard surface, the force is sent to the elbow. This tears ligaments and forces the bones out of joint. Usually no bones are broken. But the nearby nerves and blood vessels can be damaged.



Once the joint is put back in place, it will take about 6 weeks for the ligaments to heal. For simple dislocations, you will use a splint or sling for the first few weeks. You will need range-of-motion exercises or physical therapy early in your recovery. This will prevent the elbow joint from getting stiff. Later, you may need strengthening exercises.

In more severe cases, you may need surgery to realign the joint and repair the torn ligaments or broken bones. Most elbow dislocations heal fully. But there is some risk for arthritis or loss of full range of motion in that joint.

## Home care

Follow these guidelines when caring for yourself at home:

- Keep your arm elevated to reduce pain and swelling. When sitting or lying down keep your arm above the level of your heart. You can do this by placing your arm on a pillow that rests on your chest or on a pillow at your side. This is most important during the first 2 days (48 hours) after the injury.
- Put an ice pack on the injured area. Do this for 20 minutes every 1 to 2 hours the first day. You can make an ice pack by wrapping a plastic bag of ice cubes in a thin towel. You can put the ice pack inside the sling and directly over the splint or cast. Continue using the ice pack 3 to 4 times a day for the next 2 days. Then use the ice pack as needed to ease pain and swelling.
- Keep the splint or cast completely dry at all times. Bathe with your splint or cast out of the water. Protect it with a large plastic bag, rubber-banded at the top end. If a fiberglass splint or cast gets wet, you can dry it with a hair dryer.
- You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic liver or kidney disease, talk with your health care provider before using these medicines. Also talk with your provider if you've had a stomach ulcer or GI bleeding.
- Don't take part in sports or physical education until your health care provider says it's OK to do so.

## Follow-up care

Follow up with your health care provider in 1 week, or as advised. Ask your provider when to start range-of-motion exercises. These will keep the elbow from getting stiff.

If X-rays were taken, a radiologist will look at them. You will be told of any new findings that may affect your care.

## **When to seek medical advice**

Call your health care provider right away if any of these occur:

- The plaster splint becomes wet or soft
- The fiberglass splint stays wet for more than 24 hours
- Tightness or pain in the elbow gets worse
- Fingers become swollen, cold, blue, numb, or tingly
- You can't move your elbow as much as you could

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