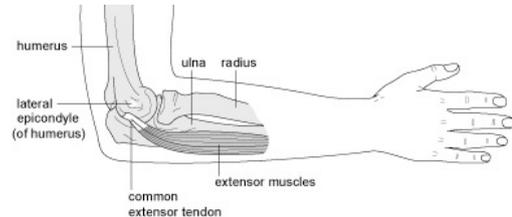


TENNIS ELBOW
- Advice & Rehabilitation Leaflet

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Patient information and rehabilitation leaflet –

Tennis Elbow
(lateral epicondylitis)



This condition can be called different things by different practitioners, which can cause some confusion. The medical name for this condition is lateral epicondylitis, but is more commonly called “Tennis Elbow.” This is a common condition causing pain over the outside / lateral aspect of the elbow, which can spread to down into the forearm, and commonly causes pain during activities or on pressure or touch. It is an over-use / under-healing injury of the attachment of the extensor group of tendons at the outside of the elbow; these are the tendons that allow you to extend your wrist and fingers, and are involved in gripping.

Tennis elbow is a condition that generally improves over time, although this can take 6-9 months, however many patients can have symptoms for much longer. There are many different risk factors for the development of tennis elbow, and whilst we can't do anything about some of the risk factors for this condition (such as age and genetic factors), it is important to reduce the ones that you can.

A range of treatments can be used to reduce symptoms and hopefully speed up recovery. Unfortunately there is no single treatment that works for everyone, however prolonged immobility or rest can worsen the condition and therefore this should be treated actively, but still using common sense. Activity modification can often help to reduce the pain, and painkillers can help to reduce the pain to allow you to continue with activity, in addition tennis elbow braces can sometimes help offload the pain during certain activities. Steroid injections can be done to reduce the pain, although this is often of only temporary benefit and there are pros and cons to injections. Other options may also be available, and these will be discussed with you as appropriate.

Undertaking a specific rehabilitation programme, such as the one as shown on the next few pages, is one of the best ways to improve. This can act both as a treatment in its own right, as well as improving the effectiveness of a range of other additional treatments when done alongside these.

The following is a reminder of the exercise that you should have been shown. It is difficult to learn these exercises from a piece of paper; instead this is to help you remember what you have been shown already.

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The home exercise regime is broken down into the following two sections:

1. Stretches of the wrist, forearm, and elbow
2. Specific strengthening exercises for the forearm muscles

In addition to these rehabilitation exercises, it is important to progress back to regular physical activity to maximise health gains.

1. Stretches of the wrist, forearm and elbow

With all of the following stretches we normally recommend starting by holding the position for about 10-15 seconds, performing the stretch 3 times on each arm, and repeating these at least 3 times per day.

To progress these exercises, increase the stretch by 5 seconds each week until you are holding the stretch for 30 seconds each time.

a) stretching with your elbow straight

This stretch targets the muscles, which can often become tight with a tennis elbow.

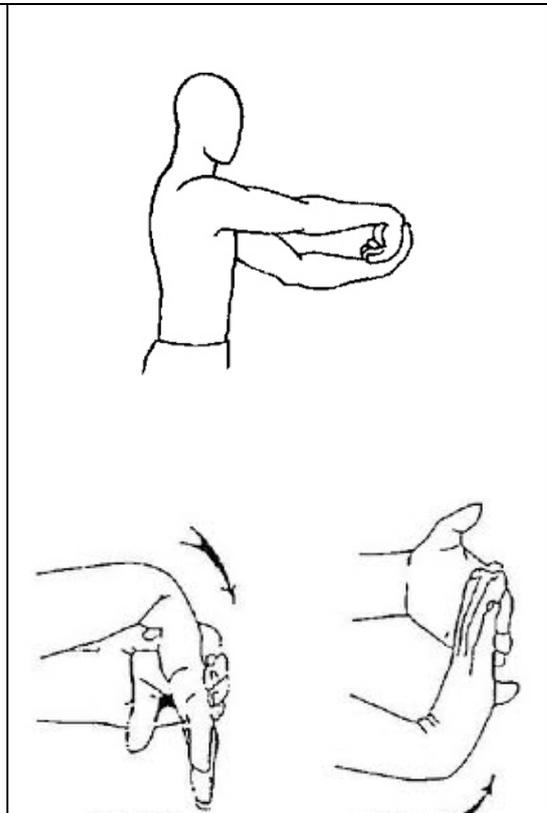
With your affected elbow held straight, bend your wrist so that your fingers are pointing towards the floor. With your other hand press gently onto the back of your knuckles to create a stretch which you should feel into the back of your forearm.

Hold this position initially for 10-15 seconds

Then slowly release the hand and point your fingers up towards the ceiling

Again with the opposite hand take hold of the palm of your hand and gently pull back, keeping your elbow straight, and you should feel a stretch on the underside of your forearm

Repeat these stretches three times in total, and repeat these stretches on the opposite arm as well as the affected arm.



b) stretching with your elbow bent

Repeat the above stretch, but this time with your elbow resting lightly on a table or pillow and bent to half-way. Repeat the above stretch with both arms, keeping your arm bent all through the exercise.

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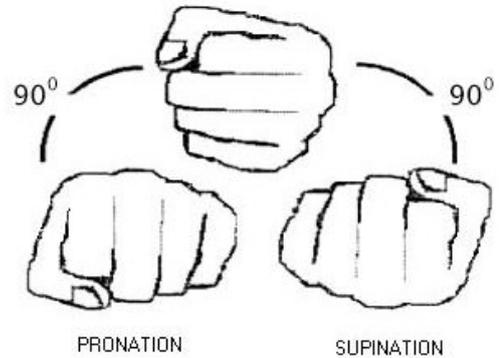
b) “rotational stretching” with your elbow bent

This stretch works in a more rotational manner.
Start in a sitting position with your affected arm in your lap, with the palm facing upwards (this is called a supinated position)
Reach underneath the affected arm with your opposite hand and grasp the base of your thumb
Keep the wrist of your affected arm straight throughout this exercise
Use the opposite hand to gently rotate the affected hand by pulling on the base of the thumb
Hold this position initially for 10-15 seconds

The gently release the hand, and rotate the affected arm so that the palm is now face down. (This is called a pronated position.)

Place your opposite hand over the top of the affected hand and again try to pull the hand in a rotation manner a little further round
Hold this position initially for 10-15 seconds then gently release

Repeat these stretches three times in total, and repeat these stretches on the opposite arm as well as the affected arm.



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2. Specific strengthening for the forearm muscles

In addition to flexibility exercises, it is important to progress specific strengthening exercises for the muscles of the in order to reduce your pain. There is some evidence that even if you have symptoms only on one side that these exercises should be done for both sides.

We would normally ask you to do 3 sets of each of these exercises, once or twice a day only – starting at a number of repetitions where you are starting to feel the load and each week you should increase the number that you are doing slightly.

It is important that you listen to your body throughout the rehabilitation period, and only progress as far and as fast as your symptoms allow.

a) “Wrist drop” strengthening exercise

For this exercise you will need a light-weight object such as a filled water bottle, a full tin, or a light-weight dumbbell.

Sit down with your affected arm either supported in your lap or over the edge of a table, gripping a light weight such as a bottle of water. Keep your elbow bent to about half-way doing these exercises

Cock your wrist back as far as it can go – and hold this position for 2-4 seconds

Very slowly let the wrist fall down to a bent position as far as it will go whilst still gripping the object – this should take at least 7 or 8 seconds

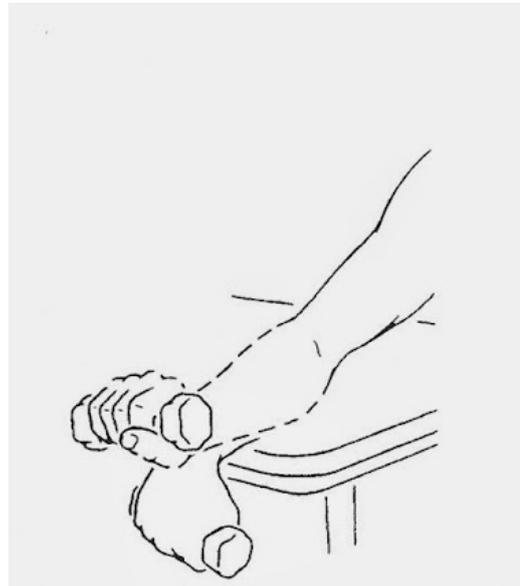
Hold this position for 2-4 seconds

Very slowly raise the wrist once more until it is back in the cocked position

Repeat this exercise until you start to feel an ache in the area of your tennis elbow

Pause for a minute or two and then repeat the same number three times in total, pausing between sets as before.

To progress this exercise, increase the number that you are doing in each set slightly each week.



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b) "Rotation" strengthening exercise

For this exercise you need a light-weight hammer, alternatively a household broom can also be used.

Sit or stand with your elbow bent to half-way, and ideally pressing a pillow between your elbow and your chest (not shown) to keep your elbow tucked in. Hold a light-weight hammer upright, held towards the head-end, in your affected arm with your wrist straight. (This should initially be held at the centre point of balance between the two ends.)

Keeping your elbow tucked against your body, slowly rotate the hammer outwards as far as it will go. When you have gone as far as you can, pause for 2 seconds

Then slowly rotate the hammer so that the head is towards your body, again as far as it goes.

It is important to rotate the hand very slowly, ideally taking 10 seconds or more to move from the end of one position to another

Once you have rotated as far as you can, again pause for 2 seconds, before slowly bringing it back to neutral.

Repeat this exercise until you start to feel an ache in the area of your tennis elbow

Pause for a minute or two and then repeat the same number three times in total, pausing between sets as before.

To progress this exercise, to start with increase the number of repetitions in each set slowly week by week.

Once you have reached sets of 15, then to progress further then move where you are gripping slowly away from the head of the hammer slightly further each week.



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c) "Grip strength" exercise

For this exercise you will need a small towel or ball such as a squash or tennis ball.

Using the rolled up towel or ball, keeping your wrist straight, grip this in your affected hand as hard as you can.

Hold this initially for 10 seconds, then slowly release
Repeat this at least 3 times using both hands

To progress this exercise, increase the duration of the hold by 5 seconds each week, then increase the number of repetitions.



d) "Winding up" strengthening exercise

For this exercise you will need a broom, or similar pole.

Hold a broom handle horizontally out in front of you with both hands.

Imagine there is a string coming down from the broom to a weight on the floor

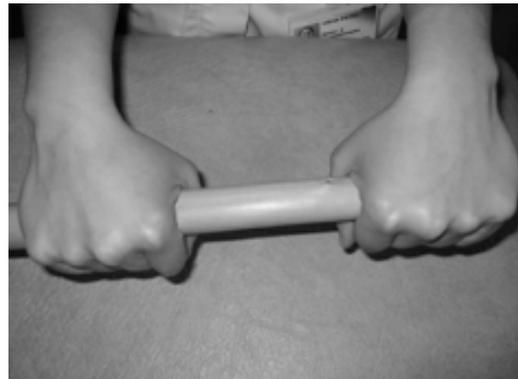
Slowly wind the broom handle back using both of your wrists, imagining you are lifting the weight off the floor
Perform 5-10 movements with each wrist

Then imagine you are slowly winding the weight back down towards the floor

Again, perform 5-10 movements with each wrist this time in the opposite direction

Repeat slowly, until you are starting to feel some discomfort in the area of your tennis elbow.

To progress this exercise, gradually increase the number of repetitions that you are doing each week.
You can also add a weight on a string and wind this up and down for added resistance.



As a last reminder, these exercises can often be uncomfortable and there is some evidence that they may need to be mildly uncomfortable in order to work.

However if you are causing significant pain, then you may be trying to do too many of these, trying to move forwards too fast, or you may be doing something wrong, and you should ask for advice.