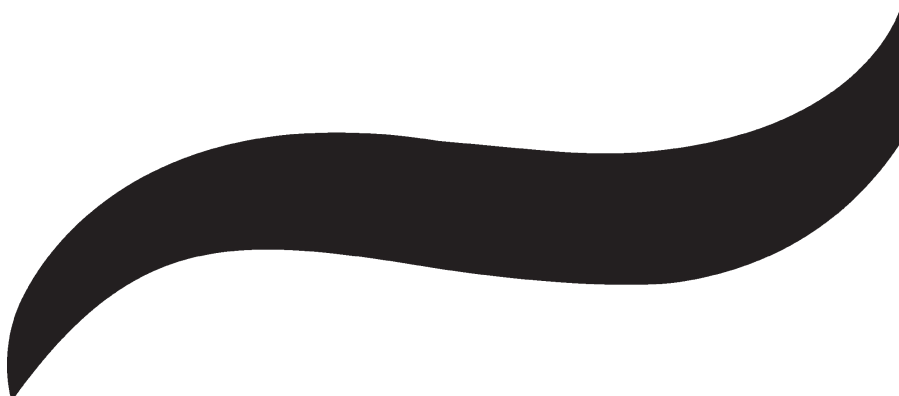




Tennis Elbow

Information for patients
MSK Physiotherapy Service



WHAT IS TENNIS ELBOW?

- ❖ A soft tissue problem
- ❖ Pain around the outside of the elbow which can move down the forearm
- ❖ It is a repetitive strain injury caused by overuse of the forearm muscles i.e. gripping, lifting
- ❖ It may also be called Lateral Epicondylitis or Lateral Epicondylopathy



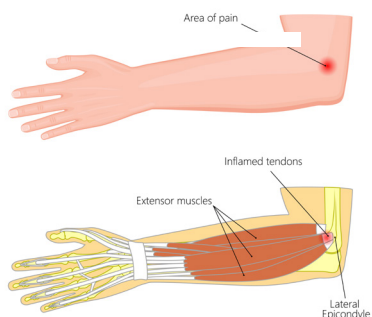
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TENNIS ELBOW?

You may experience one or all of the following:

- ❖ Outer elbow pain on gripping or lifting
- ❖ Outer elbow pain on opening jars/twisting movements of the wrist
- ❖ Localised tenderness on the outside of the elbow
- ❖ Stiffness on bending or straightening the elbow joint, particularly first thing in the morning
- ❖ Occasionally mild swelling and heat can be present

WHAT CAUSES TENNIS ELBOW?

Some of the muscles that help to move your wrist and forearm attach via a tendon to a common point at the outside of your elbow. Straining these muscles can lead to small tears and inflammation within the tendon resulting in Tennis Elbow pain.



Overuse of these muscles can happen with small repetitive movements, such as typing and using a computer mouse or with strenuous activities. It can also be triggered by a sudden increase in manual activity. For example, tasks that you would not do on a regular basis like gardening, spring cleaning or D.I.Y.

Knocking or banging your elbow can cause soft tissue inflammation and can also very occasionally trigger Tennis Elbow.

Despite its name, only around 5% of Tennis Elbow injuries are actually caused by racquet sports!

WHAT CAN HELP?

Tennis Elbow is a condition which can get better on its own over time without treatment as long as you stop or reduce activities which aggravate it.

Typically, it can take between 6 months and 2 years to improve. 90% of people with symptoms will make a full recovery within a year.

However, making changes to your lifestyle as well as reducing aggravating activities can be key to aiding your recovery.

Only you can do this.

- ❖ **Avoid** painful movements particularly those that involve straining the forearm muscles.
- ❖ **Reduce** repetitive twisting movements of the wrist, gripping and lifting.
- ❖ **Make sure** you take regular short breaks from activities that aggravate your elbow pain such as typing, lifting or repetitive work.
- ❖ **Change** activities to reduce pain. For example, lifting/carrying objects with the palms facing up can be more comfortable. Use of ergonomic computer equipment can also be helpful. Your employer may be able to supply this following a work station assessment.
- ❖ **Limit** the stress on the tendon by relaxing your grip as much as possible when lifting or driving.

Pain Relief

In the first instance you may wish to try over the counter medications such as paracetamol, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or anti-inflammatory rubs to reduce your pain.

These medications are not always suitable for everyone. Please check with your pharmacist or GP before using.

Ice

Ice can be helpful to reduce inflammation, swelling and pain.

Try using a small ice pack wrapped in a damp cloth and apply for a maximum of 20 minutes to the painful area or massaging the area with an ice cube in a cloth. This can be repeated up to 3 times a day.

Lifestyle Changes

Weight Reduction – People who are overweight tend to have more prolonged pain and poorer tissue healing due to increased levels of inflammatory molecules in the body. Reducing your weight can generally help improve the healing process. A good indicator of whether you need to lose weight is your body mass index (BMI).

**You can check
this here:**



If your BMI states that you are overweight or obese it is likely that losing weight will reduce your symptoms. Carrying extra fat also increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Reducing your portion sizes and eating a balanced diet can be helpful in reducing weight. Check out NHS Inform's 12 week weight management programme which can be found on their website here:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/12-week-weight-management-programme/>

If you need a little more help and feel that you would benefit from working with others in group sessions NHS Lanarkshire's Weigh to Go programme will help you become more active, eat well and lead a healthier lifestyle. Check out the weight to go programme on the NHS Lanarkshire website here:

<https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/weigh-to-go/>

Stopping Smoking – Smoking can cause poor circulation and results in reduced blood flow to all tissues including tendons. This can impact on the healing process which means tissues may take longer to heal or may not heal completely. Reducing or stopping smoking can help your recovery.

There is a free NHS stop smoking service available in Lanarkshire to help you succeed: <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/quit-your-way/>

Staying Active – General activity has many health benefits for the body such as increasing circulation, maintaining muscle strength and improving mental well-being. Moving the arm normally and keeping active will ensure the best conditions for improvement.

There are several ways of strengthening the forearm muscles to help reduce Tennis Elbow symptoms. You may have to try each of the exercises below to find which one is best for you.

For each exercise, the aim is to gradually increase the difficulty over time. There are three ways that you could do this.

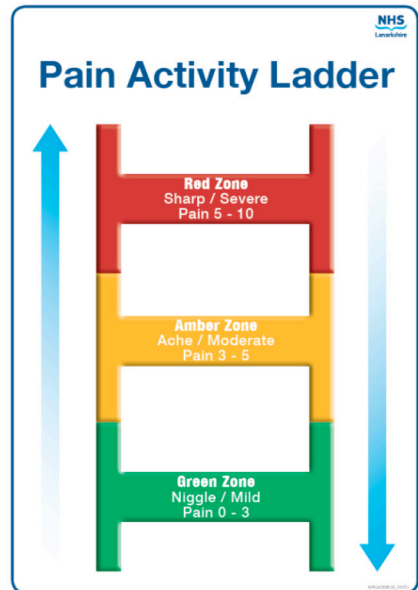
1. Increase the length of time that you hold the exercise
2. Increase the number of repetitions or the number of sets
3. If you are using a weight, increase the size of the weight

Exercise

Sometimes, more specific exercises are needed to treat Tennis Elbow. These exercises aim to strengthen and stretch the affected tendon by gradually building up the demand placed on the tendon. It is important to not overdo the exercises as this may irritate the tendon (see Pain Ladder below).

During the exercises, use the Pain Ladder as a guide:

- ❖ **Green Zone** - mild pain (0-3/10) is to be expected and is normal during and shortly after the exercises
- ❖ **Amber Zone** - moderate pain (3-5/10) during the exercises or pain that lasts more than an hour after completing the exercises should be avoided. You may need to adjust the number of exercises or how hard you are working to remain within the Green Zone.
- ❖ **Red Zone** - Severe pain (5-10/10) indicates that you are over working the tendon. **Stop this immediately** and reduce the exercises to work within the Green Zone.



Early Strengthening exercise



- ❖ Start by placing your forearm **palm down** on a table or flat surface.
- ❖ Keep your forearm on the table and lift your palm off the table with your fingers pointing upwards as far as you comfortably can.
- ❖ Place your non-painful hand against the back of your hand.
- ❖ Push one hand against the other and hold for between 4/5 seconds.
- ❖ Begin with a 5 second hold and build up gradually as pain allows, making sure to use the pain ladder to guide you. Aim to stay in the green zone.
- ❖ Repeat this 5 times and do this exercise up to 4 times a day.

Middle Strengthening Exercise



- ❖ Hold a light dumbbell or a shopping bag with a tin of beans in your affected hand. **Ensure the weight you use is comfortable to lift** and you stay in the green zone of the pain activity ladder.
- ❖ Start by placing your forearm **palm down** on a table or surface with the wrist and weight over the edge.
- ❖ Keeping your forearm on the table, use your other hand to lift your affected hand and the weight upwards as far as you comfortably can.
- ❖ Take your other hand away and slowly lower the weight down over the edge of the table.
- ❖ Repeat this 5-15 times, rest for 1 minute then repeat a further 2 times
- ❖ Do this exercise twice a day.

Middle Strengthening Exercise



- ❖ Hold a light dumbbell or a shopping bag with a tin of beans in your affected hand. **Ensure the weight you use is comfortable to lift** and that you stay in the green zone of the pain activity ladder.
- ❖ Start by placing your forearm **palm down** on a table or surface with the wrist and weight over the edge. Keeping your forearm on the table lift the weight upwards as far as you comfortably can.
- ❖ In a slow and controlled manner lower the weight down over the edge of the table.
- ❖ Repeat 5-15 times, rest for 1 minute then repeat a further 2 times.
- ❖ Do this exercise twice a day.

Late Strengthening Exercise

- ❖ Hold a light weight or resistance band in your affected hand with the **back of your hand facing upwards**.
- ❖ Keeping the wrist in a neutral and static position perform a bicep curl by bending your elbow bringing your hand close to your shoulder.
- ❖ Now slowly allow your arm to straighten in a controlled manner.
- ❖ Repeat up to 3 sets of this 5-15 times, resting 1 minute between each set.
- ❖ Repeat twice a day.



If you are unable to keep your pain level within the **Green Zone you may need to rest the tendon a little longer by stopping these exercise for a while and continuing with lifestyle changes and reducing aggravating activities only.**

Other Treatments

Steroid Injections – There is growing evidence that steroid injections for Tennis Elbow are not always effective or appropriate. Pain relief following injection tends to be short lived and can cause further damage to the tendon in the long-term.

Surgery – Surgery for Tennis Elbow is rare and is only used as a last resort if all other management options have been exhausted.

Help and Support

If your symptoms continue to worsen or do not show signs of improvement after a period of 6-12 weeks of following the advice above, a self-referral to physiotherapy can be made on our website: <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/physiotherapy-msk/>

Or via your GP.

Scan here
to access:



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