



Tennis Elbow

During the summer months, interest and participation in tennis increases with Wimbledon and better weather inspiring many to the courts. The fast pace of the game can be strenuous with every stroke of the racquet requiring players to run, twist and turn quickly, and big demands are made of the shoulder and arm muscles. Powerful serves put further strain on the shoulder, wrist and forearm. Unsurprisingly, the elbow, wrist and shoulder are some of the areas more commonly injured when playing tennis, particularly when you haven't played for a while.

What is Tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow, or lateral epicondylitis, is a common overuse injury that affects the tendons of the forearm muscle where they attach to the outer or lateral part of the elbow. Symptoms include pain over the outside elbow, which may travel up or down the arm, wrist weakness, tenderness, pain when lifting or bending the arm, difficulty extending the forearm fully, and pain when gripping, lifting and carrying.



The pain typically lasts from 6-12 weeks, but can last up to 3 years if left untreated.

How does it happen?

When playing tennis, poor technique or grip on the racquet can contribute largely to missing strokes or arriving late for the backhand shot. This in turn will affect the rest of the body as the weight will not be behind the ball. The wrist accommodates for the poor body positioning, but usually strikes the ball in an extended position, preventing the forces from being distributed evenly throughout the arm, shoulder and body. When it comes to racquet grip, the size of the grip will affect how hard the muscles in the wrist and elbow will have to work, which increases strain on the elbow.

Ironically though, only 5% of tennis elbow sufferers sustained their injuries through playing tennis – gardening, motorcycling, computer typing and DIY are just a few of the more common modes of injury.

The repetitive movements required for this injury to occur are usually forceful wrist extension, which brings the thumb outwards and the palm upwards, causing shortening of the wrist extensor muscles. When this occurs, a sudden movement at the wrist may cause a tear in one or more tendons and pain ensues.

Once injury has occurred, inflammation and irritation is aggravated by repetitive wrist movements, and a direct impact to the affected area may also trigger an inflammatory response.

Can it be treated?

The first step to treating lateral epicondylitis is to reduce the swelling to the affected area. This is usually achieved by following the **PRICE** advice –

Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

Ice can be very effective at reducing inflammation during the first 2-3 days, although it may be used for longer periods. Wearing a support brace to compress the muscle can also be useful during this stage as it reduces pulling stresses on the tendon which can cause further irritation.



Once the inflammation has settled, your Chiropractor will address the reason for the injury. This may be underlying wrist or elbow dysfunction between the radius (one of the forearm bones) and humerus (the upper arm bone), or further along the biomechanical chain such as the shoulder and neck. Ensuring these joints are working as well as possible through mobilisation and exercise aids healing and recovery times.

Soft tissue techniques to release muscle tightness and trigger points (tiny nodules in muscle fibres that send out 'referred' pain to different areas of the body), such as cross-friction across tight muscle bands, is often carried out once joint function has been addressed.

Once the underlying reason for the problem has been corrected, the final phase of Chiropractic care will be to help prevent re-injury from occurring. This may involve advice on technique to reduce stresses on the elbow joint, or modifying other activities which contribute to the development of tennis elbow. There is some evidence that using a wrist support when typing, or wearing a support brace if involved in manual work such as DIY or brick-laying, may be beneficial.

For more information, please contact your Chiropractor.

Chiropractic - Safe and Effective

Richmond UK, 349 Richmond Rd, E. Twickenham TW1 2EJ. Tel: 020 8744 9117

Purley UK, 140 Brighton Road, Purley CR8 4HA. Tel: 020 8763 2629

Sønderborg DK Rådhusstræde 3 6400 Sønderborg. Mob: (0045) 81196292

wolffclinic.com

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