

# Tennis elbow

## What is tennis elbow?

Also known as lateral epicondylitis, it is a condition that results in pain around the outside of the elbow. This is usually a result of overuse of the tendons on the outside (lateral) aspect of the forearm. Sometimes this can lead to the structure of the tendon changing and the condition can be described as tendonopathy.

The diagram below shows the area of tendon that is affected by a tennis elbow.

## Why does it happen?

Tennis elbow is most commonly caused by the overuse of muscles in the forearm that extend the wrist and fingers. Racquet sports such as tennis or other activities which involve repeated extension or twisting of the wrist may result in the onset of pain in the outside of the elbow, for example using a screwdriver or a keyboard.

Carrying heavy loads with the elbow straight and the palm facing the floor may also cause overload of the tendon.

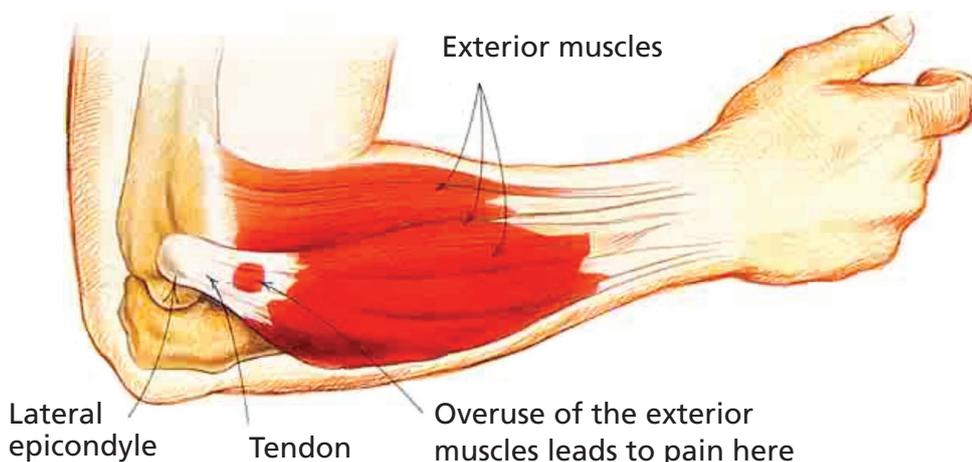
Sudden increases in activity or repeated strain can also lead to tendon degeneration such as starting a DIY project, a new job or sporting interest.

## What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are pain and local tenderness on the outside aspect of the elbow. Initially, pain may only occur with sudden forceful activity involving grasping or certain sporting or work activities. As the condition develops, dull aching symptoms may become more constant. There are usually no external symptoms present such as swelling or redness of the skin.

## How is the condition treated?

- Initially treatment involves limiting the aggravating activities that stress the tendon. This may involve adjusting sporting or working activities, for example making changes to the position of the wrist whilst using a keyboard.
- An arm brace / epicondylar clasp may be worn to reduce load on the tendon.
- The use of an ice pack applied to the painful area may help to control pain.
- Physiotherapy treatment may also help to reduce symptoms with the use of muscle stretching and strengthening exercises.
- Injections / surgery may be used as a last resort, but this is rare.

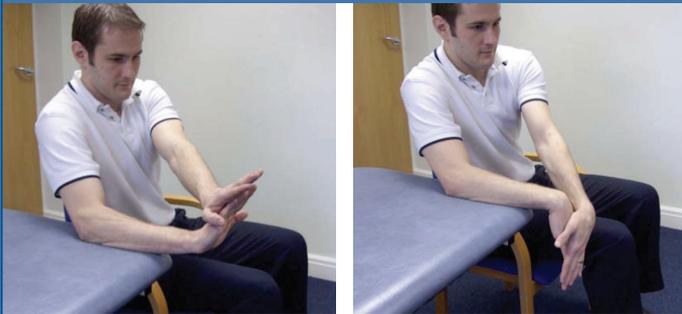


## How do I prevent symptoms re-occurring?

- Symptoms are usually caused by overuse of the forearm extensor muscles, which can be avoided.
- Activities involving repeated or prolonged grasping with the elbow straight, carrying heavy objects or high force pulling may lead to the onset of symptoms. It may be necessary to find an alternative method of completing these tasks or stopping them completely.
- Continue to perform the exercises provided by your physiotherapist to maintain flexibility and strength in the muscles of the forearm.
- Lift with the palm turned upwards.

## Rehabilitation exercises for tennis elbow

### A Eccentric wrist flexion



- Sitting with your hand supported on a table or on your knee.
- Start with your wrist extended backwards and apply pressure to the back of your hand with the opposite hand.
- Slowly start to bend your wrist whilst maintaining pressure with the other hand throughout the movement.
- Repeat this exercise until your muscles feel tired. Stop if your pain significantly increases.
- Perform this twice a day.

### B Wrist flexion stretch



- Pull your wrist forwards until you feel a stretch in your wrist.
- You may need to straighten your elbow to increase the stretch in your wrist.
- Hold for 30 seconds.
- Repeat this exercise until your muscles feel tired. Stop if your pain significantly increases.
- Perform this twice a day.

### C Grip strength exercises



- Using a stress / tennis ball or pair of socks grip as hard as you can for 10 seconds then release.
- Repeat this exercise until your muscles feel tired. Stop if your pain significantly increases.
- Perform this twice a day.

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If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0113 220 8585**, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or email [lch.pet@nhs.net](mailto:lch.pet@nhs.net)

**We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.**

Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust accept no responsibility for pain or injury resulting from the use of these information sheets. If you experience an increase in your pain that does not settle, or any other adverse symptoms, please contact your GP or physiotherapist before continuing with the exercises.