

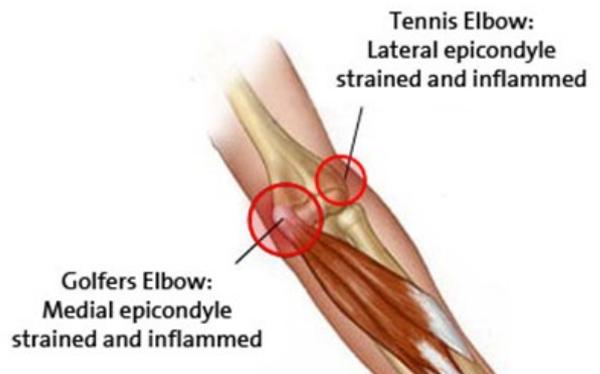
All About Elbows

Swinging into Summer

With summer on the horizon, we get to enjoy some of our outdoor favourites such as golf and tennis. However, after doing too little for too long over the colder months, we then start to do too much too quickly and this puts us at risk of injury. Two common injuries we see here at Durham House are golfer's and tennis elbow.

Golfer's and tennis elbow - what are they?

The elbow is a joint made up of 3 bones; the humerus, radius and ulna. It's a complex joint that allows us the range of motion to do things such as throwing, climbing and swinging. It also has tendons, nerves and blood vessels that start or pass through the joint. Golfer's and tennis elbow affect the tendons which attach either side of the elbow joint, which then go on to form the muscles of our forearm and hands.



Why do we get golfer's and tennis elbow?

There are generally 4 reasons why we can injure these tendons:

1. Repetitive actions which, as the tendon weakens and becomes overused, can allow it to become inflamed and strained.
2. Holding a position for too long, for example carrying a heavy load past what the tendon is ready for can cause a strain and inflammation as a result.
3. Trauma, a sudden action such as a fall or sudden pull can overwhelm the tendon.
4. Stress and tension, whilst not a direct cause, can add an extra pull on the tendons as we generally have more tension in our muscles if we are going through lots of stress. This will make injury more likely.

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis)

Tennis elbow is usually caused by overusing the muscles attached to your elbow and used to straighten your wrist. It often occurs after strenuous overuse of the muscles and tendons of the forearm, near the elbow joint. If the muscles and tendons are strained, tiny tears and inflammation can develop near the bony lump (the lateral epicondyle) on the outside of your elbow.



As the name suggests, tennis elbow is sometimes caused by playing tennis. However, it's often caused by other activities that place repeated stress on the elbow joint, such as decorating or playing the violin.

How does it feel?

You may notice pain:

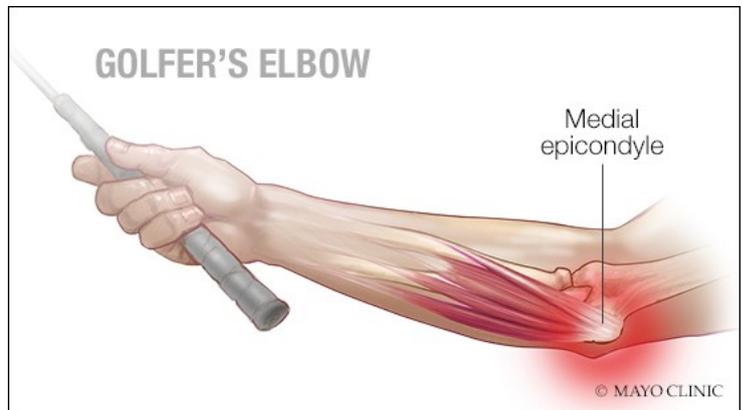
- On the outside of your upper forearm, just below the bend of your elbow.
- When lifting or bending your arm.
- When gripping small objects, such as a pen.
- When twisting your forearm, such as turning a door handle or opening a jar.
- You may also find it difficult to fully extend your arm.

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Golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis)

Golfer's elbow or thrower's elbow is a condition that develops when the tendons on the inside of the forearm become irritated, inflamed and painful due to repetitive use of the hand, wrist, forearm and elbow. It's often diagnosed in people who perform repetitive motions, such as swinging a golf club or tennis racket, or activities requiring gripping, twisting or throwing. Even using a computer or performing manual / garden work can cause the condition



How does it feel?

You might feel:

- Pain or numbness and tingling that radiates from the inside of the elbow down into the hand and fingers with gripping or squeezing movements.
- Pain along the inside of the forearm with wrist, hand, or elbow movements.
- Tenderness to touch and swelling along the inside of the forearm.
- Weakness in the hand and forearm when attempting to grip objects.
- Elbow stiffness.

What can we do to help?

We may perform strength and motion tests on your wrist, forearm and elbow, ask about your job duties and hobbies, evaluate your posture and check for any muscle imbalances and weakness that can occur anywhere along the path from your shoulder blade to your hand. Special muscle tests, such as bending the wrist or rotating the forearm with resistance also may be performed to ensure a proper diagnosis. From the history and examination we can get an idea of how long it is likely to take for you to heal.

Treatment

Without care these injuries can last from months to over a year as tendons have poor blood flow and it's hard for us to avoid using these tendons in everyday actions such as carrying and gripping objects. An inflamed tendon that is not treated can begin to tear, causing a more serious condition.

A chiropractor will devise a treatment plan that is specific to your condition and goals and may include:

Pain management

Your chiropractor will help you identify and avoid painful movements to allow the inflamed tendon to heal. Ice, ice massage or moist heat may be used for pain management. Therapeutic modalities, such as oscillation therapy (medication delivered through an electrically charged machine) and ultrasound may be applied. Bracing or splinting may also be prescribed. In severe cases, it may be necessary to rest the elbow and not perform work or sport activities that cause pain, which may slow the recovery process.

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Manual therapy

Your chiropractor may use manual techniques, such as gentle joint movements, soft tissue massage and elbow, forearm and wrist stretches to help the muscles regain full movement. Your therapist may also do manual stretching and manual techniques to your shoulder and thoracic spine as your tendons along the medial elbow can be affected by muscle imbalances all the way up the chain.

Range of motion exercises

You will learn mobility exercises and self stretches to help your elbow and wrist maintain proper movement.

Strengthening exercises

Your chiropractor will determine which strengthening exercises are right for you as your pain subsides, depending on your specific condition. You may use weights, medicine balls, resistance bands and other types of resistance training to challenge your weaker muscles. You will receive a home exercise program to maintain your arm, forearm, elbow and hand strength long after you have completed your formal physical therapy.

Patient education

Education is an important part of rehabilitation. Your therapist may suggest adjustments to how you perform various tasks and make suggestions to improve your form and reduce any chance of injury. Adjustments made in your golf swing, throwing techniques or work tasks can help reduce pressure placed on the tendons in the forearm region.

Functional training

As your symptoms improve, your chiropractor will help you return to your previous level of function. Functional training will include modifications in specific movement patterns, promoting less stress on the medial tendons. As mentioned previously, you and your therapist will decide what your goals are and safely get you back to your prior performance levels as soon as possible.

Can this injury or condition be prevented?

Understanding the risk of injury and being aware of your daily movements can help prevent the development of medial epicondylitis.

Individuals should:

- Maintain proper form and technique when performing repetitive work tasks or sports movements, like golf swings.
- Maintain shoulder, forearm and wrist muscle strength.
- Perform gentle forearm muscle stretches before and after performing tasks.
- Use proper posture and body mechanics when lifting heavy objects to reduce joint strain.

If you are experiencing elbow pain, make sure you get it assessed to see what we can do to help you!