

Tennis Elbow

Pain over the outer aspect of the elbow is a common complaint of both sports people and manual workers. Although it is called 'tennis elbow' it is more often caused by activities other than tennis! It is primarily an overuse injury involving the muscles that run from your elbow, down the back of your forearm, then along the back of your hand and fingers. These muscles have a common tendon that insert into the outer aspect of the elbow. It is the breakdown of this tendon that causes the pain (like a rope fraying). The tendon has a poor blood supply and often the body cannot repair rapidly enough the microscopic damage caused through work and exercise.

Causes

There are many possible contributing factors including:

- Sudden increase in activity
- Poor technique in racquet sports (especially backhands)
- Grip too big on your racquet
- Muscle imbalance around the elbow, shoulder or neck
- Neck problems
- No warm up or stretches prior to activity

Treatment

Treatment will depend on the assessment findings by your Physiotherapist and may include:

- Relative rest from the aggravating activity (this is vital)
- Pain relieving modalities such as interferential, ice or acupuncture
- Treatment of any dysfunction found in the neck joints
- A stretching and strengthening program (this is the most important part of your rehabilitation. If you don't do your exercises it won't get better!)
- Taping or bracing to unload the tendon
- Anti-inflammatory tablets or a cortisone injection- your doctor will advise regarding these treatment options. They should not be a substitute to a rehabilitation exercise program.

How long does it take to get better?

The majority of acute cases (symptoms less than 3 months) take between 6-10 weeks to fully recover. This is due to the fact that you must 're-build' the damaged tendon by progressive loading exercises once the initial pain has settled. Rest from aggravating activities alone will help to settle the symptoms but without treatment the problem tends to recur once you return to activity. Chronic cases (symptoms greater than 3 months) may take up to 8 months to fully recover, as there are greater degenerative changes in the tendon.