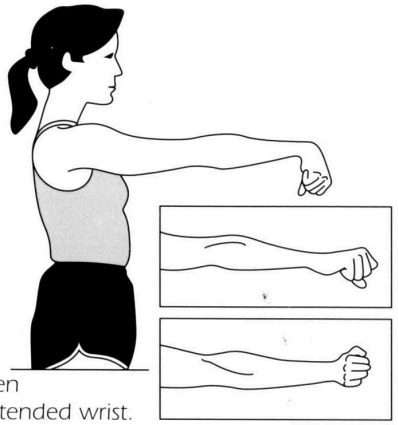
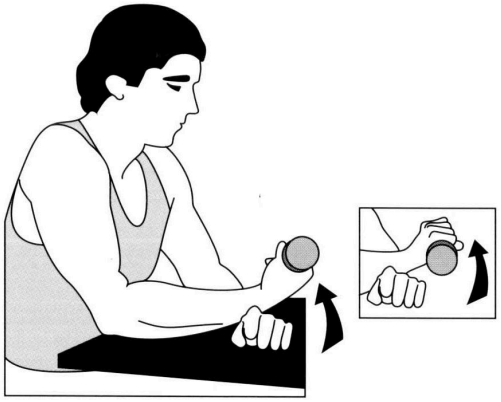
Elbow Stretch



Hold your injured arm at shoulder level in front of your body with the elbow straight. With your hand clenched, flex the wrist as far as possible. Return the wrist to neutral position, and alternately turn the arm inward with a flexed wrist, and then outward with an extended wrist.

Repeat _____ times,_____ times/day.

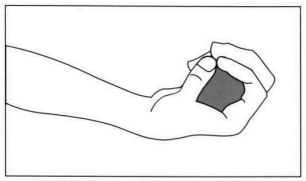


Wrist Curls

Sit with your injured arm resting on a table and supported by your fist, as shown. Grasp a one-pound weight or unopened can of food and slowly raise your wrist as high as possible. Do the exercise first with palm up, then with palm down. As your strength improves, you can gradually increase the weight of the dumbbell.

Repeat _____ times,_____ times/day.

Squeezing



Squeezing a rubber ball (racquet-ball size) will also strengthen the injured area. If that is too difficult, start by squeezing a sponge or washcloth in water.

Repeat _____ times,_____ times/day.

Twisting

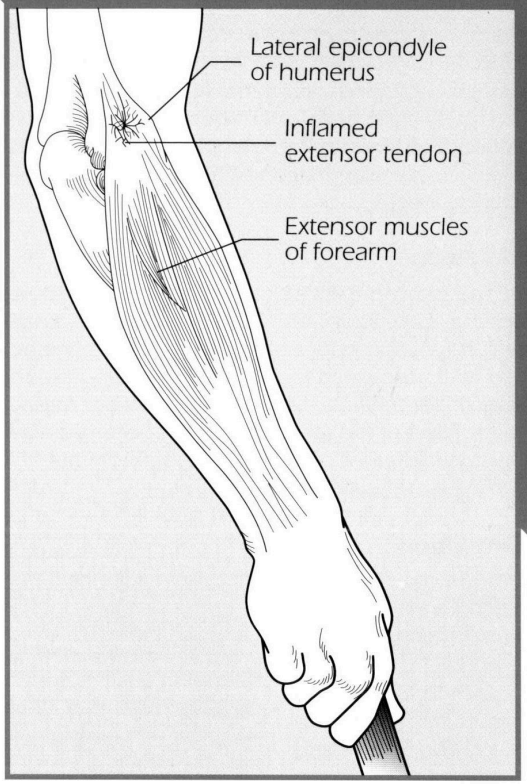
With your arms outstretched, practice wringing out a dry terry cloth towel with both hands.

Repeat _____ times,

_____ times/day.

IN SUMMARY

Tennis elbow/golfer's elbow is a common injury among people who are active in these sports. Many injuries can be successfully treated, allowing you to return to an active life. Your physician is your best source of information about how to relieve your discomfort.



TENNIS ELBOW AND GOLFER'S ELBOW

THE INJURY

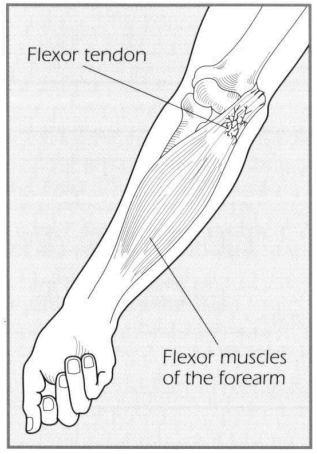
Many racquet players and golfers, both amateur and professional, suffer from tendinitis or epicondylitis [EH-pih-kon-dih-LYE-tiss] (tennis elbow/golfer's elbow). It can also happen to anyone who uses frequent turning or twisting motions of the forearm (for example, a carpenter). Pain is caused by an inflammation of the connective tissue in the elbow area.

Tennis Elbow

This injury involves the tendons attached to the muscles that extend (straighten) the wrist and fingers. A small tendon originating from a very small area of bone at the elbow is connected to the large extending (extensor) muscles of the forearm. With repetitive use of these extensor muscles, the attached tendon becomes overworked and inflamed. This produces pain on the *outside* of the elbow.

Golfer's Elbow

The same thing happens with golfer's elbow, but different tendons are involved. In golf the tendons that attach to forearm muscles to flex (bend) the wrist and fingers (flexors) are overused. The pain here is on the *inside* of the elbow.



You are more likley to suffer from tennis/golfer's elbow if

- You have weak muscles and/or muscle imbalances
- You overuse muscles—play excessively, repeat violent extension or twist your wrist
- You use improper equipment—incorrect grip size, strings too tight, imbalance of string tension
- You do not use proper playing technique—too much wrist action, jerky strokes, poor ball contact.

TREATMENT

Rest

You may have to stop playing golf, tennis, or other racquet sports for a while. This period of rest is very important, because you don't want to aggravate the condition by continuing activity, especially if you experience pain. Your doctor may even recommend that you not use your arm for anything—for example, lifting a briefcase, opening doors, repeated handshaking. Only rarely will a sling relieve the discomfort.

Ice

Apply ice to your elbow three times a day for 30 to 60 minutes in the early painful stage and for 15 minutes after active use of your arm. Protect your skin by putting a towel between your elbow and the ice bag.

Stretching

Stretching will help prevent stiffness by breaking down any scar tissue that may result from inflammation (see Exercises).

Physical Therapy

At first a physical therapist will work with you to reduce the inflammation in your arm. The therapist or your doctor can teach you the technique of ice massage. Later they will teach you how to strengthen your muscles to protect the inflamed area and prevent the injury from happening again.

Medication

Your doctor may prescribe medication or an injection of local anesthetic to help relieve inflammation and pain. If necessary, an injection of cortisone may also be used to relieve the pain and joint tenderness. This can make physical therapy more effective. After a cortisone injection, you shouldn't engage in sports for about a week or two. Check with your doctor for his or her recommendation.

Brace

Your doctor may recommend any of several braces, supports, or molded casts designed for this problem. A brace provides support for your elbow, thus reducing the pressure on the inflamed tendon. At first you may need to wear the brace at all times, except when doing gentle exercises to avoid elbow stiffness. Later, it may be necessary only for protection during activities using the injured arm.

Surgery

Surgery is rarely required for tennis or golf elbow.

RETURNING TO SPORTS

The Warm Up

ALWAYS WARM UP CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU PLAY. Put all your major joints through their complete range of motion several times. Very slowly, "shadow" (mimic) all the motions you use in your sport. In tennis, do ground strokes against a wall and general serving. Rallying is not a substitute for warming up. Stretching and strengthening exercises help prevent injury.

The Racquet

Use a lighter weight racquet and move your hand up a bit on the grip. Oversize and composite racquets are much easier on your arm than standard racquets. Change to a racquet that has greater spring. Reduce your string tension. Grip size can also be an important factor. If possible, discuss equipment with your local pro.

The Stroke

In tennis, the backhand, the serve, or the overhead smash may be equally damaging to your elbow if they are not done well. The two-handed backhand tends to be easier on your elbow. Avoid the shots that aggravate the problem. Reduce wrist motion to a minimum. Lessons may be necessary to alter your strokes.

The Game

When you go back to your sport, take it easy. In tennis, rally at first only for short periods of time, avoiding problem shots. Play less time each day or play doubles. Avoid playing competitive games until your elbow is healed. In golf, start with only putting and pitch shots. Slowly work up from a few holes to a complete game. Use properly sized/designed equipment.

EXERCISES

Weak muscles are a major contributor to the problem of tennis and golfer's elbow. Exercises will strengthen the muscles associated with the damaged tendons. Stretches and exercises should be avoided in the very painful stage. DO EACH PRESCRIBED EXERCISE TWO TIMES A DAY OR AS OFTEN AS YOUR DOCTOR RECOMMENDS.