



Orthopedic Associates OF PORT HURON

Tennis Elbow (Lateral Epicondylitis)

What is Tennis Elbow?

Tennis elbow is an inflammation, soreness, or pain on the outside (lateral) side of the upper arm near the elbow. There may be a partial tear of the tendon fibers, which connect muscle to bone, at or near their point of origin on the outside of the elbow.

What Causes Tennis Elbow?

This type of injury is caused by repetitively twisting the wrist or forearm. The injury is classically associated with playing tennis, especially when hitting the backhand, but any activity that involves repetitive twisting of the wrist (like using a screwdriver) can lead to lateral epicondylitis. Individuals with muscle weakness in the shoulder (rotator cuff) and/or forearm and wrist are prone to this type of injury.

What are the Symptoms of Tennis Elbow?

- Elbow pain that gradually worsens
- Pain radiating from the outside of the elbow to the forearm and back of the hand when grasping or twisting
- Weak grasp

How is Tennis Elbow Diagnosed?

The diagnosis is made by clinical signs and symptoms, since x-rays are usually normal. Often there will be pain or tenderness when the tendon is gently pressed near where it attaches to the upper arm bone, over the outside of the elbow.

Also, there is pain near on the elbow when the wrist is extended (bent backwards, like revving a motorcycle engine) against resistance.

What is the treatment for tennis elbow?

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen, naproxen or aspirin)
- Local injection of cortisone and a local anesthetic into the affected area
- Immobilization of the forearm and elbow with a splint for 2 to 3 weeks
- Physical therapy consisting of stretching, strengthening and anti-inflammatory modalities

To prevent the recurrence of the injury, a splint may be worn during aggravating activities, or the activities may need to be modified. If the pain persists despite these non-operative treatments, surgery may be necessary.

What is Expected Outcome from Tennis Elbow?

Over 90% of people improve with non-surgical treatment. Of the 10% that need surgery, 90% of these experience subsequent relief.

The Complications of Tennis Elbow Include:

- Recurrence of the injury with overuse
- Rupture of the tendon with repeated steroid injections
- Failure to improve with non-operative or operative treatment; these may be due to nerve entrapment in the forearm.

How Can Tennis Elbow be Prevented?

Maintain good strength and flexibility in the arm muscles or avoid repetitive motions. Rest the elbow when flexion and extension is painful. An ice pack applied to the outside of the elbow after repetitive motion may help alleviate symptoms.

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