



Exercise for tennis elbow

What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow is a painful condition of the outer side of the elbow (an area called the lateral epicondyle). This pain is a result of damage to the tendons that attach the forearm muscles to the bone. The damage is caused by overuse of the forearm muscles, especially with twisting and gripping actions such as using a screwdriver or wringing clothes.

As the name suggests, tennis elbow can also be caused by playing tennis (or gripping any racquet), although only about five cases in every 100 are caused by playing tennis.

Who gets tennis elbow?

Around 1–3 people in 100 have tennis elbow..

Tennis elbow affects men and women equally, and usually occurs in people aged around 45–55 years.

Tennis elbow often occurs in people who perform repeated twisting and gripping actions; for example, carpenters.

Sometimes it starts when you suddenly use your forearm muscles in a way they're not used to, such if you start a DIY project, gardening or playing a lot of tennis on holiday. Other times it develops for no apparent reason.

What should I do if I have tennis elbow?

First, you shouldn't worry: for the vast majority of people the pain resolves. But be prepared for this to take some time – that is, weeks to months.

Usually the first thing we suggest is the wait-and-see approach. Note that this doesn't mean you ignore the pain, rather it means you should:

- remain active and do not restrict arm or elbow movements
- not perform movements and tasks that provoke pain greater than 3 out of 10 (where 10 is the worst pain imaginable)
- not immobilise the elbow or upper limb (e.g. do not use a sling)
- not lift an object with hands in the face-down position.

If your pain hasn't improved after 6–12 weeks then you might want to consider physiotherapy. This can also be started earlier and may help relieve pain earlier.

What does physio involve?

A physiotherapy program delivered by a physiotherapist typically involves wrist exercises, elbow manipulation and instructions for what to do at home. This is delivered over a series of appointments (e.g. around eight 30-minute sessions)

You can also try performing some simple exercises at home.