

Tip of the month submitted by Dr. Jeff Hartwell DC.

Tennis Elbow: Lateral epicondylitis. This is inflammation and micro tears of the tendons of the extensor muscles on the outside of the elbow, causing pain that can last for years if untreated. Tendons have less blood supply than muscles, so they heal slower.

Causes: Over-use of the wrist/ forearm. Almost 50% of tennis players get it (common with beginners and poor back hand technique, but even experienced players can get it). Tennis players make up only 5% of those diagnosed with the condition. It can occur from many other overuse activities involving gripping, lifting or carrying repetitively.

Treatment:

- 1) **Stop the activity that caused it.** The tendons need to rest and heal. Don't lift with the hand palm down. Stop playing tennis until you can lift a light chair with the affected arm straight out in front of you.
- 2) **Stop the inflammation:**
 - a) Topical creams such as Traumeel (with arnica) at least three times per day.
 - b) Ice (I prefer 5 minute ice massage with frozen Styrofoam cup, but 20 minutes of ice pack is OK. Perform at least twice per day.)
 - c) Oral anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen or natural alternatives such as bromelain, ginger and turmeric extracts, and or fish oils.
 - d) If chronic and severe, cortisone injections or surgery can be performed.
- 3) **Start stretching:** Multiple times per day, at least 20 seconds each position. 1) Arm in front of you, elbow straight, pull hand and fingers down, palm toward you. 2) Same position but palm away from you, pull hand and fingers down.
- 4) **Strengthen** at least every other day.
 - a) Isometrics (hold for 3 sets of 5 seconds each.) Push into extension from 3 positions. (Straight, down and up)
 - b) Isotonics (Rubber tubing/ Theraband/ light hand weights) 2 sets of 15 slowly.
Wrist extension, Wrist flexion, Radial deviation, Ulnar deviation, Pronation, Supination
- 5) **Use an Elbow counterforce strap.** These decrease the stress on the tendon and give it a rest. These should be worn during any arm activity.
- 6) **Chiropractic or physical therapy:** Elbow adjustment, deep massage and myofascial release techniques, ultrasound or muscle stimulation.

Prevention:

- 1) **Warm up before use. Stretch full body, but especially forearm (see above).**
- 2) **Strengthen: Forearm, Shoulders, Core muscles, Legs.**
- 3) **Use proper playing/work technique.**
- 4) **Correct grip size for racquet (Nirschl technique)**
- 5) **Decrease string tension 2-5 pounds to about 52-55 lbs.**