Lateral Epicondylitis (Tennis Elbow)

**WHAT IT IS**

Lateral epicondylitis (tennis elbow) refers to inflammation of the lateral epicondyle (the bony prominence on the outside of the elbow). The lateral epicondyle is where your wrist extensor muscles attach. This condition causes pain, swelling, and tenderness on the outside of the elbow. Tennis elbow may also be called Painter’s elbow or Mechanic’s elbow.

**HOW IT HAPPENS**

Tennis elbow occurs when the wrist extensor muscles become overused. Factors that may increase your chances for tennis elbow include:

- Weak extensor muscles
- Tight forearm muscles
- Improper racquet technique
- Increasing intensity too quickly

**WHERE IT HURTS**

Most of the pain will be localized to the lateral (outside) part of the elbow. The elbow may look red and feel hot or swollen. Pain may be increased with elbow range of motion or wrist extension. The elbow might also feel tight or weak. Activities that may increase pain include:

- Performing a backhand in racquet sports
- Picking up objects with palm facing down
- Golfing
- Turning a doorknob
- Weightlifting

**IMMEDIATE TREATMENT**

- **REST** the elbow from activities that cause pain.
- **ICE** the elbow by applying an ice bag or performing an ice massage to the affected area for 10-15 minutes to decrease pain and swelling. Ice may be applied once per hour.
- **IBUPROFEN** can help decrease both pain and inflammation. Take NO MORE than 1200 mg per day following the label’s recommended amounts.
**STRETCHING EXERCISES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Extensor Stretch</td>
<td>Keep the elbow straight and gently flex the wrist. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Flexor Stretch</td>
<td>Keep the elbow straight and gently extend the wrist. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Supinator Stretch</td>
<td>With your elbow bent, use a hammer or dowel rod to rotate the wrist so the palm faces the ground. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Pronator Stretch</td>
<td>With your elbow bent, use a hammer or dowel rod to rotate the wrist so the palm faces the ceiling. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRENGTHENING EXERCISES**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Flexion</td>
<td>Place one end of a resistance band under your foot and the other in your hand, with the palm facing the ceiling. Flex your wrist upward toward the ceiling 10-30 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist Extension</td>
<td>Place one end of a resistance band under your foot and the other end in your hand, with your palm facing the floor. Extend your wrist toward the ceiling 10-30 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronation/Supination</td>
<td>Place one end of a resistance band under your foot and the other end in your hand. Rotate your wrist, having your palm face both the floor and ceiling 10-30 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger Extension</td>
<td>Place a rubber band around all your fingers. Extend and spread all your fingers at the same time, stretching the rubber band 10-30 times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball Squeezes</td>
<td>Squeeze a tennis or racquetball in your hand 20-30 times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE**

- Activities that do not cause pain are allowed
- Activities that cause or increase pain should be avoided
- Do not try to play through the pain
- Return to activities slowly with a gradual increase in intensity and duration
- Continue forearm stretching and strengthening activities to avoid future problems

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Injury Prevention & Care - A Campus Recreation Program
http://crec.unl.edu/ipcare

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