

Healthier Communities,  
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Sherwood Forest Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

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# Tennis elbow

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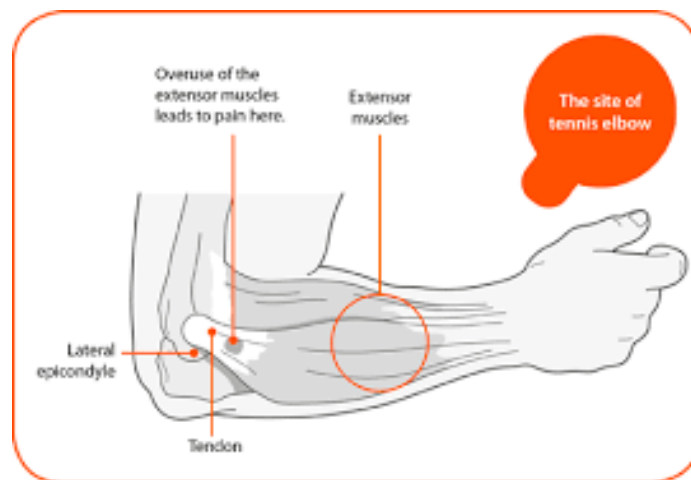
This booklet contains information about your tennis elbow problem and aims to answer some of the questions you may have about the condition.

## What causes elbow pain?

Elbow pain generally has a simple cause and clears up within a few days. The pain often comes from strained or inflamed soft tissues, such as tendons, and with rest and simple pain relief settles down quickly and you can return to your normal activities.

## Tennis elbow, what is the problem?

Following overuse (too much activity) or unaccustomed activity of the elbow, the tendons can react and become inflamed (warm, tender and/or swollen) and painful. With simple rest and not using the elbow too much this can settle down and go away. However, for some people this does not happen and the pain and discomfort can carry on for a number of weeks or months. This is thought to be because the body is struggling to heal and repair itself. This can happen for a number of reasons.



Often tennis elbow is termed “lateral epicondylitis” with “itis” meaning inflammation. However, this is a little misleading as the cause may be tendon degeneration rather than inflammation.

Although tennis elbow is painful it does **NOT** lead to any long-lasting damage or arthritis.

Tennis elbow is an overuse injury related to activities that involve repetitive extension of the wrist and hand. People who continually grip and twist, for example plasterers and carpenters, can experience problems and also more commonly people who use a computer and keyboard repetitively.

The good news is that in around 80% of people with tennis elbow, the problem recovers with simple treatment.

### **Tennis elbow, how is it diagnosed?**

Your physiotherapist will be able to diagnose your tennis elbow by asking you questions about your problem and performing a simple clinical examination. Occasionally we may request an x-ray or other investigation such as an ultrasound or MRI scan, to rule out other problems and/or confirm your diagnosis.

### **Who gets tennis elbow?**

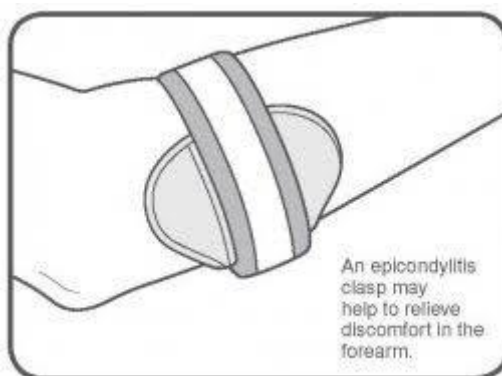
Anybody can get tennis elbow but it is most common between the ages of 40-60.

### **What treatments are there for tennis elbow?**

As already mentioned, relative rest and avoiding the activities that you find aggravating can often allow the symptoms to settle down and resolve fairly quickly. Simple painkillers can also help.

### **Splint**

Using a splint, known as an epicondylitis clasp, can help reduce the strain on the painful tendons. These can be used to help reduce your pain while performing simple daily tasks and activities that would normally cause discomfort.



Epicondylitis clasps are available from chemists, sports shops or physiotherapists.

### **Heat/ice packs**

Applying a heat pack to the sore area can help reduce pain and stiffness. A hot water bottle or wheat pack is a simple and practical way to help ease symptoms. An ice pack, for example a bag of frozen peas, can also be helpful.

Make sure that you do not apply heat or ice direct to your skin to avoid burning or irritating it. Also make sure you do not use them for too long; 10-15 minutes every 2-3 hours should be enough.

## Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy is a very effective way of treating tennis elbow. Your physiotherapist will often look at how you use your elbow and suggest ways of helping you manage your pain and symptoms along with methods to optimise your arm function, for example improving work ergonomics.

Exercises are an important part of physiotherapy treatment.

Exercises to improve the flexibility and strength of your tendons will be shown to you by your physiotherapist. This is done carefully and progressed so not to cause too much pain. You will be expected to continue with your exercises at home as advised by your physiotherapist. Please don't worry if your recovery seems slow; the exercises do need time to work and this does vary from person to person.

### Wrist flexion



Keeping your arm straight in front of you with your palm facing down, gently bend your wrist down. Use the opposite hand to press the stretching hand back towards your body and hold for 15-30 seconds. Gently bend your stretching hand backwards and use the opposite hand to pull the fingers back. Hold for 15-30 seconds

Do 3 sets with each wrist.

### Wrist turn



Bend your elbow at a right angle and hold out your hand palm up. Turn your wrist slowly so that your palm is now facing down. Hold for 5 seconds, and then slowly release.

Do 3 sets of 10 repetitions

### Wrist turn with weight



Repeat the exercise above while holding a light weight (e.g. a tin of beans).

Do 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

**Do not start any exercises until a therapist has shown you or advised you.**

### **Steroid injections**

If your symptoms are bad and not improving with the measures discussed above, your doctor or physiotherapist may discuss whether a steroid injection is something that may be advisable.

Steroid injections are an effective treatment with very few side-effects, although they're only effective in the short-term (up to six weeks). Most people will get better over time whether they have an injection or not - sometimes an injection just speeds up the recovery.

### **Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections**

This is becoming an increasingly popular treatment for tennis elbow. It involves taking a small amount of blood from you and placing it in a machine that then separates the various cells in the blood. The cells that are thought to help with healing and repair are then taken out and injected back into the painful tendon area. A number of studies show this helps reduce the pain and improves function in patients with tennis elbow who have not found benefit with the treatment discussed above.

### **Surgery**

Most patients find the above treatments usually resolve their tennis elbow problem. However, a small number may go onto a surgical intervention. Tennis elbow surgery is usually done as a day-case and involves a small incision over the painful area. The surgeon will then release and clear away the painful part of the tendon. After surgery you will have physiotherapy to help you recover fully.

If you are at all worried about your shoulder you should contact the Sherwood Forest Hospitals' Shoulder and Elbow Team.

### **Useful contact numbers**

**Kings Mill Hospital campus**  
**Tel: 01623 622515**

**Newark Hospital campus**  
**Tel: 01636 681681**

#### **Extension number**

King's Mill physiotherapy  
department

3221 (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm)

Newark hospital physiotherapy  
department

5885 (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm)

## Further sources of information

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

## Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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