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Epicondylitis



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What is it?

There are two bony protrusions on the elbow where the muscles attach that are called epicondyles—one on the inside (medial epicondyle-flexor muscles) and one on the outside (lateral epicondyle-extensor muscles). Epicondylitis implies inflammation or pain in these areas. This pain is usually more noticeable after stressful or repetitive use of the arm. Pain at the lateral epicondyle has been reported in persons that play racquet sports and it has been labeled "tennis elbow." Medial epicondylitis has been seen in golfers so it has been termed "golfer's elbow." One does not have to participate in sports activities to develop these problems.



Diagram 1Tennis elbow causes pain at the attachments of the extensor muscles of the forearm to the lateral epicondyle.

What causes it?

Repeated use of the arm and elbow or injury to this area may cause stress or damage at the muscle attachment. The symptoms are thought to be caused by this damage. Most persons that develop epicondylitis are involved in activities that include repetitive use of the arm or hold the wrist in extremes of rotation.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The area of greatest discomfort is just over the bony prominence at the elbow. This area is tender to touch, and resisted rotation of the wrist usually causes pain in the elbow. With severe cases, any motion of the elbow may be painful.

What is the diagnosis?

This condition is diagnosed by exclusion. This implies that there are no other reasons for pain in the area of the elbow. Your hand surgeon will in most cases be able to diagnose the problem by examination. Some cases may require X-rays to be sure that the elbow joint is not the problem.

What is the treatment?

The goal of treatment is pain relief. It may include limiting activities that cause the discomfort. A therapist may be recommended to help with an exercise program to strengthen the affected muscles. A thick band around the elbow is usually helpful to hold in heat as well as protect the tender area from trauma while healing. Severe cases may require a splint to rest the elbow. Anti-inflammatory medication is usually prescribed or may be directly injected into the painful area. Surgery is rarely required for pain that does not respond to other measures.

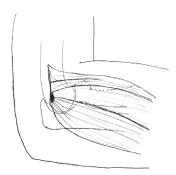


Diagram 2
Golfer's elbow causes pain at the attachments of the flexor muscles of the forearm to the medial epicondyle.