

Tennis Elbow

This leaflet offers general information about tennis elbow and simple exercises that may help. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a clinician.

What is tennis elbow and why have I got it?

Tennis elbow is a term used to describe pain around the tendons on the outside of the elbow. It is often a result of repetitive work or overuse, though any activity that involves gripping and twisting of the forearm can cause this – in fact most cases aren't related to tennis. Golfer's elbow is a similar condition that affects the tendons on the inside of the elbow joint.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms can vary, but common ones include:

- Pain or discomfort when moving the arm or gripping
- Tenderness when touching the outside of your elbow and forearm
- You may have pain further down your arm
- Repetitive movement of the wrist will worsen symptoms.

What treatments are available?

Simple self-help treatments are probably all you'll need to help your symptoms. The first thing you can do to help is adapt movements that may be causing your symptoms. For example, lift objects with your palms facing upwards and elbows bent.

Medication

Painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen may help. It's important that you take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue exercising. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers. You can also rub anti-inflammatory cream directly onto the painful area.

Medication can have side-effects so you should read the label carefully and check with your pharmacist or doctor if you have any queries.

Steroid injections

A corticosteroid injection can sometimes decrease the localised inflammation and therefore reduce the pain. It is generally used only when other options have been fully explored.

Exercise

Exercise can help you to manage pain and improve movement and activity. Completing the following exercises every day may help to reduce your elbow pain:

1. 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 five seconds, and then slowly release.
Do three sets of 10 repetitions.



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



3. Bend your elbow at a right angle. Hold a light weight (e.g., a tin of beans), palm up. Bend your wrist slowly towards you. Hold for five seconds, and then slowly release.
Do three sets of 10 repetitions.



4. Keeping your arm straight in front 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.
Do three repetitions on each wrist.



5. Stand up straight and lower your arm to one side. Bend your arm slowly upwards so your hand is touching your shoulder. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
Repeat 10 times.



Physiotherapy

A physiotherapist can provide a variety of treatments, help you understand your problem and get you back to your normal activities, if the above exercises don't help.

What happens if I do not get treatment?

After one year, eight out of ten people with tennis elbow will have improvement of symptoms, whether they have treatment or not. Symptoms usually last for between six and 24 months.

Things to remember

Therapists are there to support you - don't feel you have to know everything or must work through this alone.



Be consistent – do your exercises regularly as guided but remember to give yourself appropriate amounts of rest as well.



Be patient – recovering from tennis elbow takes time. But if you do it right the first time, you'll be much better prepared for self-managing if you get a flare up in the future.



Stay healthy – exercising as able, sleeping and eating well, as well as being positive can all affect your pain levels and your general health.

Useful sources of information

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

<https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/elbow-pain>

Versus Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition, please contact the MSK Physiotherapy team on 020 8812 4018 (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-outpatient-physiotherapy/resources-for-patients-start-your-recovery-today/

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: THE_TE_01 **Published:** December 2020 **Review date:** December 2022