Orthopaedic Connection

Painful Elbow, Ouch!

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

What Is It?
Most elbow pain just happens. The person did not have any elbow injury in the past that caused it. There is no sign of infection and no recent trauma, arthritis or swelling. How can this be?
The majority of elbow pain is like this. Pain is more common on the lateral or outer side than the inner or medial side.
The pain comes from tiny tears in tendons that attach to the bony parts of the elbow.

The Cause
Overuse of the forearm muscles causes tiny tears in the tendon attachment near the bone. I’m oversimplifying somewhat, but pain is caused it seems from the inflammation that results from the tissue tearing.
Any activity that requires rotating the forearm and extending the wrist can lead to the condition.

Tennis Elbow
Technically the condition is called epicondylitis, but everyone knows it by its common name, tennis elbow.
Most people who get tennis elbow don’t even play tennis! It is also common in golfers, baseball pitchers, gardeners and others who make a repetitive motion with one of their arms.
If you don’t give those tiny tears time to heal the tendon attachment becomes painful and inflamed.
Tennis elbow usually affects adults between 35 and 50 years.

Signs and Symptoms
• Pain is centered around the bony prominence on the outer side of the elbow.
• Golfers more commonly feel the pain on the part of the elbow closest to the body.
• Pain radiates down into the forearm sometimes even to the wrist.
• Gripping or lifting makes the pain worse.
• Some patients describe it as burning pain.

Treatment
• Stop doing whatever caused it (if you know).
• Give the tendons time to heal. It may take 2 or 3 weeks.
• Take Advil or similar for pain and inflammation.
• Apply an ice pack over a cloth on the skin for 10 minutes twice a day. Don’t apply directly to the skin.
• Apply Theragesic ointment or some similar topical medication to the painful area 2 to 3 times per day.

Doctor Treatment
After examining your elbow and getting an x-ray, if your home treatment didn’t work I might do this.

- Prescribe an elastic Velcro brace worn just **below** the elbow on upper part of the forearm.
- Arrange for a Physical Therapy appointment.
- Inject the painful area with a steroid medication.
- Ask how to adjust the activities causing it.
- Suggest surgery if the condition is disabling and nothing has helped over time. Most of the time surgery is not necessary.
- Continue strengthening exercises to prevent a recurrence.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

**Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive**

Wow! Your window to the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal world opens at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains 1) The Website Library of Information 2) Your Orthopaedic Connection 3) GCH Archive of all previous articles.

You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.

All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.

Be well. Good health, good life, all the best to you.

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