Orthopaedic Connection

Tennis Leg. What?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Orthopaedic Surgery is filled with all kinds of common names which are attached to conditions or injuries. Be honest, unless you are a tennis player who has heard of this malady?

What Is Tennis Leg?
Acute strains or even rupture of the medial (inner side) calf muscles termed the Gastrocnemius. Sometimes it occurs not in the muscle substance, but where the tendon and muscle join in the leg. It happens most often in people over 30 years who play tennis. It also occurs when you are jumping or happen to run on a hill.

What You Feel
A pulling or tearing feeling in the upper calf several inches below the knee. Maybe a snap is heard. Then diffuse calf pain followed by tenderness and swelling.

- You hold the foot down to avoid tension on the injured muscle.
- Limping
- Calf may get black and blue (don’t worry it is harmless)

Making The Diagnosis
Physical exam of the affected leg including knee and ankle is best. Check for a defect in the muscle you can feel. Tests to rule out Achilles tendon rupture and blood clot. I prefer to do an x-ray of the lower leg to be sure the tibia and fibula are intact. An MRI may be indicated to evaluate the seriousness of the muscle injury.

Treatment
Medial gastrocnemius tears are treated non-surgically. Surgery is rarely needed. Some measures that are often used initially:
- Elevation of leg for a day or two (rest)
- Ice to calf
- Ibuprofen or similar
- Crutches, cane or walker
- A walker – boot is often prescribed
- Weight bearing as tolerated

Rehabilitation
After about a week of the above measures I prefer to have patients attend physical therapy rather than “doing rehab on their own”. Why? Because you are not a physical therapist. The entire leg (lower extremity) needs to be rehabbed.
- Supervised exercise program
- PT modalities to decrease inflammation
- Advice in alteration of activities and/or training
- A good home program is needed to compliment PT in the PT facility

**Treatment Goal**
This is not a trivial injury. “Oh, it’s only a pulled muscle.” Wrong.
You need good follow up and careful PT supervision to avoid chronic pain, weakness, limping and dysfunction. It can take 8 weeks (or more) to fully recover. But if managed properly complete recover is possible. If you don’t make your living playing tennis, do you want to go through this again?

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

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