

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylalgia)

Information for patients

This leaflet has information and advice on how to manage your tennis elbow. If you have any queries or concerns please contact your GP.

What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow is a condition that results in pain around the outside of your elbow. Around your elbow you have a collection of muscles, ligaments, tendons and bone; an injury to the muscles is what causes the pain.

Mechanism of injury

You may develop tennis elbow for a variety of reasons. It is most commonly seen in the working population, and most people experience symptoms on their dominant side. It may result from the repetitive overuse of your elbow, for example by doing the same movement over and over again which results in stress in the muscle, occasionally causing micro tears which may lead to pain.

Symptoms

You may develop pain in and around your elbow, in particular it may be uncomfortable around the outside of your elbow and forearm. Other symptoms you may experience include pain on gripping, lifting or repetitive wrist activity. You may also find that the stiffness is eased with gentle movement.

Management

- **Ice:** a cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short-term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every three hours and up to four times a day, ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin.
- **Relative rest:** reduce activities that are making your symptoms worse, for example, the length of time you use your hand and elbow.
- **Painkillers:** pain relief can help manage the discomfort in the short term. Normally painkillers bought from a pharmacist will work. If you have any questions please speak to a pharmacist.
- **Splint:** if your symptoms are not improving then you may benefit from a wrist splint, these will look to reduce the load through your elbow. You can get one of these from a pharmacy or online.

- Exercise: you should complete specific exercises that aim to increase the strength of your arm; this will help you return to activities. Please see below for suggestions of a graded exercise programme.

Follow-up

You do not routinely require physiotherapy for this type of injury, most find they improve with time and simple exercises. If your elbow pain does not improve after 6 to 12 weeks then you may benefit from physiotherapy. We recommend you contact your GP to refer you to your local physiotherapy department.

Healing

This type of injury can take approximately 6 to 9 months to resolve.

What to expect

Weeks since injury	Rehabilitation plan
0 to 1 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use ice and elevation to help swelling ✓ Begin the 'Stage one exercises' on page 3 ✓ Follow the management advice as per above
2 to 5 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Once your pain has begun to settle, start the exercises below labelled 'Stage two exercises'.
6 to 12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Once you are able to complete 'Stage two exercises' then progress onto the next stage. You may be able to progress onto these earlier than 6 weeks if your pain has reduced, sometimes it can take longer than 6 weeks to progress. ✗ If, after 6 weeks, you are struggling with any of the following please contact your GP for an assessment and possible referral to your local physiotherapy department.

Initial advice

Cold packs

A cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin.

Rest

Try to rest the elbow for the first 24 to 72 hours (1 to 3 days) if it is particularly painful.

Early movement and exercise

Early weight bearing (putting weight through your injured limb) helps increase the speed of healing. Try to carry out your daily activities as normally as possible as this will help with your recovery.

Stage one (3 to 4 times a day)

Sustained muscle hold (isometric exercise)

Pushing up



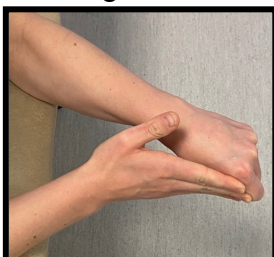
Make a fist with the hand on the side of your painful elbow. Using your other hand, apply pressure downwards onto your fist, whilst pushing upwards with your fist at the same time. Neither hand should move. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, you will feel the muscles in your wrist and arm working. Rest for 30 seconds and then repeat twice more.

Pushing down



Make a fist with the hand on the side of your painful elbow. Using your other hand, apply pressure upwards onto your fist, whilst pushing downwards with your fist at the same time. Neither hand should move. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, you will feel the muscles in your wrist and arm working. Rest for 30 seconds and then repeat twice more.

Pushing to the side

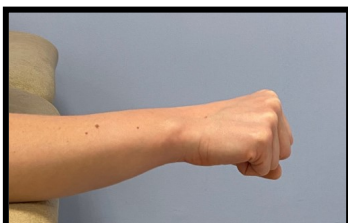


Make a fist with the hand on the side of your painful elbow. Using your other hand, apply pressure onto the side your fist and push sideways into your hand with your fist at the same time. Neither hand should move. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, you will feel the muscles in your wrist and arm working. Rest for 30 seconds and then repeat twice more.

Do this pushing outwards and inwards.

Stage 2 exercises to do 4 to 5 times a day

Moving wrist down to neutral



Make a fist with your hand, with your knuckles facing upwards.

Keeping your wrist in a neutral position. Drop your fist downwards as if doing a knocking action, and then lift back to the starting position. Try not to lift your fist higher than the neutral starting position.

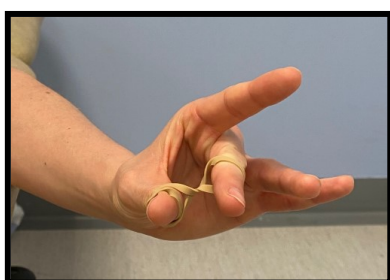
Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Moving wrist from side to neutral



Rest your forearm on a table. Have your hand and fingers flat. Move your wrist so that your thumb comes inwards towards your body, and then return back to the starting position. Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Middle finger raise with elastic band



Put an elastic band around your thumb and middle finger. Ensure there is some tension in the band but it is not too tightly wrapped around your finger or thumb.

Keeping your thumb still, lift your middle finger up and down 8 to 12 times.

You should feel the muscles working in your forearm. Rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Stage 3 exercises to do once a day

To start once you can comfortably complete stage 2 exercises

Moving wrist up and down



Make a fist with the hand on the side of your painful elbow with your knuckles facing upwards, keeping your wrist in a neutral position. Drop your fist downwards as if doing a knocking action, and then lift your wrist all the way up so that it passes neutral. You should aim to move through the whole range of your wrist.

Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Moving wrist from down to neutral with small weight

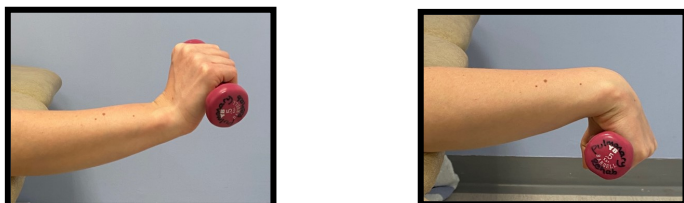


Hold a small weight such as a can of beans or water bottle with the hand on the side of your painful elbow with your knuckles facing upwards, keeping your wrist in a neutral position. Drop your fist downwards as if doing a knocking action, and then lift back to the starting position. Try not to lift your fist higher than the neutral starting position.

Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Stage 4 exercises to do once a day

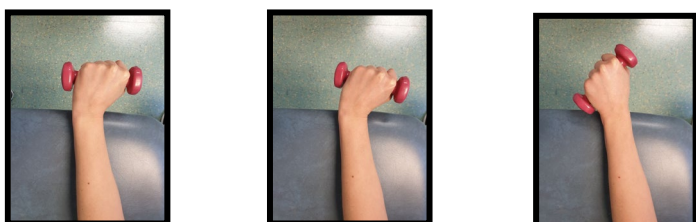
Moving wrist up and down with a small weight



Hold a small weight such as a can of beans or water bottle with the hand on the side of your painful elbow with your knuckles facing upwards, keeping your wrist in a neutral position. Drop your fist downwards as if doing a knocking action, and then lift your wrist all the way up so that it passes neutral. You should aim to move through the whole range of your wrist.

Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Moving wrist from side to side



Rest your forearm on a table. Hold a small weight in your hand such as a can of beans or water bottle, with the palm of your hand facing to the floor.

Move your wrist so that your thumb comes inwards towards your body, and then return back to the starting position.

Repeat 12 times, rest for 30 to 45 seconds and repeat twice more.

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.