

What is my diagnosis?

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) is a condition that causes pain and tenderness around the outer aspect of the elbow. It is called tennis elbow because it can be associated with repetitive forceful gripping activities such as encountered during racquet sports. It is also common amongst manual workers, although it can happen to anybody.

Why has the tennis elbow developed?

Usually, tennis elbow is caused by overloading the tendon that attaches your wrist muscles to your outer elbow. These muscles are the ones that cause your wrist to extend and twist, and your fingers to straighten. It is often aggravated by lifting, gripping and repetitive action of the wrist and hand.

Changes to the structure of the tendon may cause pain to occur around the outer elbow, usually, close to where the tendon attaches to the bone, discomfort can also be felt in the forearm.

Common associations include:

- Manual jobs such as plumbers, mechanics, or electricians
- Any activities that involve a lot of repetitive movement elbow, wrist and hand.

What are the treatment options?

Most cases of tennis elbow do not require treatment and resolve.

It is a condition that most people can easily self-manage at home, with the right combination of:

- Modifying your activity – you may need to change the way you lift or carry things for a short period of time and avoid any activities that make the pain worse e.g., racquet sports
- Painkillers, if necessary
- Orthoses – A support or strap in the early stages of the injury (epicondylitis clasp)
- Ice or heat therapy
- Exercise – stretches and strengthening (Can be supported by a Physiotherapist)
- Steroid injections are **no longer routinely offered** for the treatment of tennis elbow as there have been studies to suggest they can make symptoms and outcomes worse in the longer term.

Patient Information Sheet

Tennis Elbow

What do I need to know?



Surgery. This is **rarely**, if ever, performed.

- The tendon is released, repaired or debrided, but is replaced by a large scar which can be sensitive and painful.
- The swelling can come back after surgery
- The wound can leak fluid and may require prolonged dressings with a nurse
- Elbow stiffness and pain can develop after surgery.