

# Caring for your tennis elbow

Department of Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: March 2024

Next review: March 2027

Leaflet number: 1017 Version: 2

## What is tennis elbow?

It is a condition that causes pain around the outside of your elbow, which can extend down your forearm. Pain may be the first thing you notice but you may also feel your hand grip becomes weaker. It is made worse by gripping or extending your wrist and fingers. In 75% of people it happens in the hand you use the most. It is a common problem that affects 1 to 3% of the population. People aged between 30 to 50 are more likely to have this problem. Despite its name, only 5% of people who play racket sports get tennis elbow. Recovery time can be up to 9 months, but 90% of people will fully recover in this time

## What causes tennis elbow?

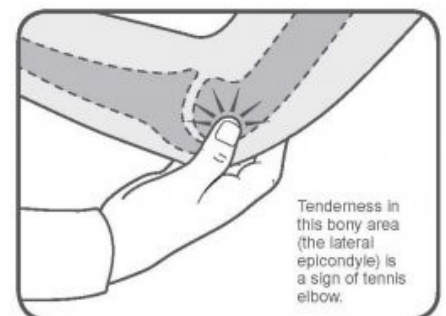
Pain may start for no reason. Often there may be an increase in activity or an injury. Repetitive gripping or wrist actions such as using a screwdriver or a computer mouse are common causes. The tendons on the outside of your elbow, whose job it is to move the wrist and fingers are pulled upwards. The tendons may become swollen or tight. That is why gripping and lifting your wrist can be sore.

## How is tennis elbow diagnosed?

You may notice pain in the outer part the elbow when you move your wrist or fingers, for example,

- when playing a musical instrument,
- carrying, holding a cup or opening a jar.

Elbow movements are not usually affected. If you press your outer elbow you may be aware of the pain.



**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

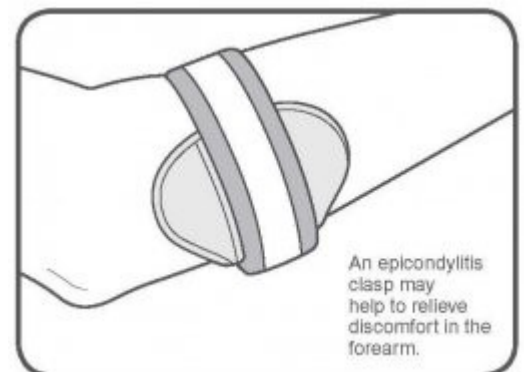
## How should tennis elbow be treated?

Change the way you do things:

- Try to reduce the activities that cause the pain for 6 weeks. If the pain becomes too much you may need to stop the activities that cause the pain for a while. Activities such as, strong gripping, pinching or vibration tools.
- Think about swapping hands or temporarily doing tasks in a different way.
- Lift objects with your palm facing up rather than gripping and pulling up.
- Reduce the weight you lift for example, divide your shopping into more bags so they are lighter in weight.
- Reduce the number of times you do a task.
- Use short cut keys on the keyboard rather than using the mouse .
- Use washing-up gloves when gripping a jar to open it.
- Take regular breaks.
- Ask for help or ask someone to take on the task.

## Pain relief

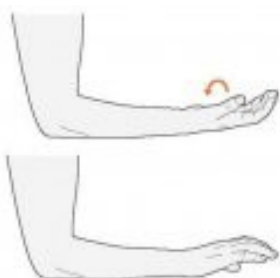
- Use pain relieving gel on the area.
- Try over-the-counter medication such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, as advised by your pharmacist.
- Think of making a temporary tennis elbow clasp.



## Physiotherapy and simple exercises

Physiotherapy can help you to manage pain and improve your strength and flexibility. Physiotherapy can help you return to your normal activities and to understand your problem. If symptoms have not improved after 6 weeks you can self refer to physiotherapy. You can get the form from your GP surgery reception or UHL physiotherapy self referral on-line.

The wrist strengthening exercises shown below should not cause any pain.



### Exercise 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 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

Repeat the exercise using a light weight such as, a can of beans.



### Exercise 2

Make a fist

Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

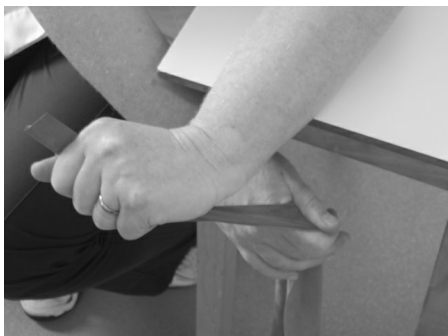


### Exercise 3

Move your hand upwards at your wrist.

Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

To make this exercise harder, place your other hand on top of your affected hand, and then move your hand up.



### Exercise 4

If exercise 3 is too easy, try pulling up against an elastic band.

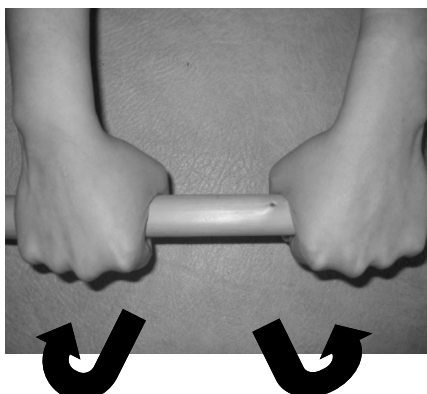
Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 5

Hold the elastic band in both hands, with your unaffected hand above. Move your affected hand downwards, using the resistance of the band.

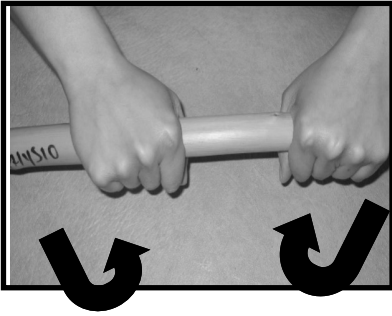
Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times



### Exercise 6

Grip a stick. Try to move your wrist towards your little finger.

Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 7

Grip a stick. Try to move your wrist towards your thumb.  
Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 8

Hold the elastic band in both hands, with your unaffected hand above. Tilt your wrist down towards your little finger.  
Hold for 5 to 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 9

Tilt your wrist up towards your thumb.  
Hold for 15 to 30 seconds Repeat 10 times.



### Exercise 10

With your elbow bent, gently bend your wrist down, using your unaffected hand. You should feel the stretch on the top of your wrist or hand and forearm in your affected hand.

Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

To make it stretch further you can gradually straighten your elbow.



### Exercise 11

Pull your affected wrist or hand backwards using your unaffected hand. You should feel a stretch in the underside of your forearm or wrist.

Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

## Summary

- Tennis elbow is caused by a strain to the tendons in your forearm. You may feel pain in your arm and tenderness in your elbow.
- Try the exercises suggested here to help ease pain and prevent future symptoms.
- If you can, avoid repetitive movements of your elbow and hand in the early stage.
- You can take painkillers to ease pain. Taking them before exercise can help you stay active without causing extra pain.
- Use an ice pack or hot water bottle, and learning how to protect your joints will help.

See <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tennis-elbow> for more details

## Contact details

**Physiotherapy Departments:** Glenfield Hospital: 0116 258 3595  
Leicester General Hospital: 0116 258 4070  
Leicester Royal Infirmary: 0116 258 5816

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો  
ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)