

## Tennis Elbow and Golfer's Elbow

This is a condition that plagues many racquet players and golfers, both amateur and professional. It is sometimes referred to as tendonitis or epicondylitis and can also occur in anyone who uses frequent rotational or strong gripping motions of the forearm. The condition consists of an inflammation of the tendons that attach to the end of the arm bone in the elbow area.

### TENNIS ELBOW or LATERAL EPICONDYLITIS

This injury involves the tendons on the outside of the elbow that attach to the muscles that act on the backside of the wrist and hand. These wrist extensor muscles pull the wrist and fingers backward and contract strongly with any gripping activity of the hand. A small common extensor tendon at the outside of the elbow anchors a large group of extensor muscles in the forearm. Repetitive gripping and strong use of these extensor muscles can cause tissue failure at the muscle-tendon junction, causing the tendon to become inflamed. This produces pain on the outside of the elbow.

### GOLFER'S ELBOW or MEDIAL EPICONDYLITIS

The same type of problem that occurs with tennis elbow on the outside of the elbow also occurs on the inside of the elbow. A small flexor tendon connects the elbow to the muscles of the forearm that flex the wrist and fingers toward the palm of the hand. Strong use of these muscles can cause injury and inflammation of the attached tendon at the inside of the elbow.

### Contributing Factors

- Weak muscles and/or muscle imbalances
- Overuse – playing or working excessively involving repeated and forceful gripping, extension or twisting of the wrist
- Improper equipment – incorrect grip size, strings too tight or racquets or tools that are too heavy or unbalanced.
- Poor playing technique – too much wrist action, jerky strokes, poor ball contact

### Treatment

- *REST! REST! and more REST!* You have to stop the aggravating activity. A period of rest is important to allow the injury a chance to heal. You will make the condition worse by continuing your activity, especially if you experience pain. Only rarely will a sling relieve the discomfort, but you may not want to even use the affected arm for anything, such as picking up a briefcase, opening doors, or repeated handshakes.
- *Ice.* Ice your elbow three times a day for 20 – 30 minutes in the early painful stage after active use of your arm. Put a towel between your skin and the ice to protect your skin.
- *Medication.* You should take an anti-inflammatory as you need to. In some cases an injection of cortisone and a local anesthetic directly into the tendon area can

- assist. If you receive a cortisone injection, you should not play sports or use the arm forcefully for at least two weeks.
- *Brace.* You should get a counter-force brace, which is worn one to two inches below the elbow. This type of brace gives compression to the forearm muscles and helps lessen the force that the muscle transmits to the tendon. At first, the brace should be worn at all times when the tendon is acutely inflamed. Later, as the inflammation subsides, the brace is only necessary for protection during activities that will stress the injured arm
  - *Surgery.* Surgery is rarely required but is sometimes recommended in severe cases.

### Returning to Sports

- *Warm up.* Always warm up carefully before you play. Put all of your major joints through their complete range of motion and work up a “sweat” prior to stepping on the court or course. Follow this by slowly performing the motions that you use in your sport.
- *Your racquet.* Use a lighter weight racquet and move your hand up a bit on the grip. Change to a racquet that has a greater spring. Reduce your string tension. Grip size can also be an important factor. If possible, discuss equipment with your local pro.
- *Your style.* In tennis, the backhand, the serve or the overhead stroke may be damaging to your elbow if they are not done well. The two-handed backhand tends to be easier on your elbow. Avoid shots that aggravate the problem. Reduce wrist motion to a minimum. Lessons may be necessary to alter your strokes.