



Pain Free Game!

Common Golf and Tennis Injuries

Early morning first tracks atop the morning dew on the tees, fairways, and greens. Birds chirping at the morning's first light. Ahhh, to many of us, this is music to our ears. With the arrival of Spring weather, many of us are unveiling our golf clubs from the confines of our basements and garages. Others find themselves tightening the strings on their tennis racket as the thought of Spring tournament play draws near.

Whether you consider yourself a weekend warrior or club champion, most of us at some point in our sport of choice have experienced a setback caused by injury or pain. In particular, golf and tennis tend to elicit similar injuries due to their repetitive nature.

Golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis) is similar to its counterpart, tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis). The primary difference between these two conditions are the location of the pain and the activity that leads to injury. However, both conditions are caused by overuse of the muscles and tendons of the forearm, leading to inflammation and pain around the elbow joint. The pain of golfer's elbow is similar to tennis elbow. The only difference is that golfer's elbow occurs on the inside of the elbow while tennis elbow occurs on the outside.

Tennis elbow is one of several overuse injuries that can affect your elbow and is most often caused by, but not limited to, playing tennis. Symptoms of tennis elbow may include pain that radiates from the outside of your elbow (near the bony protuberance) into your forearm and wrist. Most people will experience pain when they extend their wrist and middle finger, shake hands, turn a doorknob, or lift an object such as a gallon of milk. As its name depicts, playing tennis, particularly the repeated contraction of the forearm muscles that you use to straighten and raise your hand and wrist, is one possible cause of the condition. It is often exacerbated by a backhand stroke with poor technique, thereby leading to overload of the extensor muscle group. This repeated motion and associated stress may result in inflammation from a series of tiny tears to the tendons and tissue that attach the forearm muscles to the bony prominence at the outside of your elbow. If left untreated, tennis elbow can result in chronic pain.

Golfer's Elbow (medial epicondylitis) is similar to tennis elbow, however, the pain is experienced on the inner side of the elbow and can radiate into your forearm and wrist. This condition is not just limited to golfers. Rather, racket sports, throwing sports and others who repeatedly use a tight grip while flexing the wrist and extending the elbow in an oftentimes rapid, high velocity contraction. Stiffness, weakness, and numbness and tingling are symptoms which, depending on their severity, can sometimes limit your ability to continue play. Oftentimes, golfer's elbow can begin after a sudden force to the elbow or wrist, such as striking the ground during your swing where the club head has a rapid decrease in velocity.

Treatment Program for Tennis Elbow and/or Golfer's Elbow

1. To begin, it is always a good idea to have an orthopedist or sports medicine specialist evaluate your elbow to determine if any fractures or anything more serious might exist.
2. Allow some time to heal. This could mean a few days or possibly weeks. If the diagnosis is either tennis elbow or golfer's elbow, the first step is to put your tennis or golf game on hold until the pain and tenderness subsides. If you return to sport too soon, you risk continued microtrauma to the tendons and muscle, not to mention persistent and chronic pain.
3. Ice the affected area in 15-20 minute increments, several times a day, for several days.
4. Consider anti-inflammatory medications if recommended by your doctor.
5. Have a professional evaluate your technique. See your club's golf pro or tennis pro to evaluate your swing or backhand. It will probably be money well spent! By keeping your wrist rigid during your swing or lifting exercises, you can utilize larger muscle groups in the upper arm, thereby effectively reducing the load or stress on the muscle-tendon attachments. Problems with your golf swing may cause you to use your wrist and forearm muscles more than you should. In tennis, you may have to reduce your topspin or use a two-handed backhand.
6. At times massage therapy or ultrasound can be productive and therapeutic.
7. Warm up, stretch, and strengthen the affected area. It sounds counterintuitive, but the same exercises that will ultimately help you rehabilitate the area might cause pain if you have not given yourself sufficient time to heal. Work on strengthening your forearm muscles, both flexors and extensors. It is important to continue these exercises even when you have become pain free in order to help prevent a reoccurrence. Lift smartly- keep your wrist rigid during strength training exercises. To stretch, use one hand to pull the fingertips back towards your body, in both palm up and palm down positions.

The correct balance of each of these items listed should certainly put you on the road to recovery. Each person will adapt differently to these treatment modalities depending on the severity of the tendonitis. With that said, the ultimate goal is to get you to return pain free to your sport or activity as quickly as possible. See you out there!

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