

## Physiotherapy Department

# Lateral Elbow Pain

### What is Lateral elbow pain?

Tennis elbow, lateral elbow pain or lateral epicondylalgia (previously epicondylitis) is a condition that causes pain on the outer aspect of the elbow.

It affects around 40% of the population at some point and commonly presents in men and women aged between 35-54 years.

Lateral elbow pain normally affects the dominant arm and is more prevalent in manual workers.

A third of people can have symptoms that last over 1 year and a considerable proportion of these people experience a recurrence of symptoms.

Symptoms can come on randomly or by overusing the arm or hand with certain activities.

### What causes it?

You have a number of muscles that attach at the elbow which allow you to move your hand and wrist.

These muscles attach to the bone via a tendon and it's the tendon that causes the problem in lateral elbow pain.

The tendon (known as the common extensor tendon) attaches to the bone on the outer aspect of your forearm (lateral epicondyle).

Through overuse or overload of that tendon (for example when doing a lot of typing, gardening, manual jobs or anything repetitive) the structure of tendon starts to change.

The body attempts to repair the tendon and you may not feel pain initially. Eventually the body will not be able to keep up with the rate of overuse and the pain will become noticeable.



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The Lateral Epicondyle where the tendon attaches.

## Symptoms

### The symptoms you might experience with this condition are:

- Pain on the outer aspect of your elbow.
- Pain that spreads into the forearm and is tender to touch.
- Pain on gripping and lifting items.
- Pain on writing, typing and using a mouse.
- The movement of your elbow shouldn't be affected but may still be painful.

## Treatment

### A recent review of the evidence around treatment for lateral elbow pain has shown that:

- Exercise therapy is most effective at reducing pain and improving function.
- Orthotics (such as an epiclasp) can be effective in the short term .
- Acupuncture has shown to have limited effects.
- Ultrasound has no effect.
- Steroid injection can reduce pain in the short term but can damage the tendon in the long term.

## Exercises

### How to get to the starting position:

- Straighten your elbow with your wrist pulled back (palm facing away from you) and keep it in this position (1). Use the other hand to push down onto the back of the hand but don't let it move (2). This should bring on your pain.

1



2



- Holding this position slowly bend the elbow by bringing it back to your side. Stop at the point where the pain stops (3).

3



**This is the starting position you exercise in (NO PAIN)**

### How to perform the exercise:

- The exercise is to try and stop the hand being pushed down by your other hand. The effort you put in should be about 50%. There should be no pain. You hold this position for 30-60 seconds, repeat three times in a row then rest. Repeat once daily.
- Once you can do this comfortably and it causes no increase in pain then you can start to straighten the elbow bit by bit and repeat the exercise. Try to aim for it to be a little straighter each week, providing there is no increase in pain.
- Once you can do this exercise pain free with your elbow fully straight you can move onto the next stage. Hopefully you should have noticed some improvements in your pain by this stage.

## Other things to try

Try and reduce the load you are placing on the elbow by modifying or stopping the activity that causes pain.

An epicalp (a strap that wraps around the forearm to offload the tendon to allow it to rest) can be effective short term pain relief. This can be used to allow continuation of work or hobbies. It must not be worn long term and you should not use it as a treatment.

Where the clasp or  
tape should sit



**The tendon can take months to settle and begin to strengthen so persevere with the exercises. If your symptoms worsen or do not improve within 4 weeks, or you have any other symptoms such as pins and needles or numbness down the arm into the hand, please speak to your GP or a physiotherapist.**

For exercise progression or regression please see our website and use the elbow on the body chart to locate the correct video or use the QR code below.

<http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>



**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

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**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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