



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Sports Medicine: Lateral Epicondylitis (Tennis Elbow)

Lateral epicondylitis (EH-puh-kaan-duh-LI-tuhs), or tennis elbow, is an injury to the outer side of the elbow where the muscles and tendons attach to the bone. The muscles or tendons of the forearm that pull your wrist back (extend the wrist) get damaged. It is a common and painful condition that occurs not only in tennis players, but also in anyone who performs repeated, resisted motions of the wrist.

Signs and symptoms

- pain or tenderness on the outer side of the elbow
- sometimes swelling
- pain with lifting objects, like a coffee cup
- pain or weakness with gripping
- pain with twisting motions of the wrist (playing tennis, opening a door or a jar)

Increased risk

- sports or jobs that require repeated and hard forearm and wrist movements (tennis, squash, racquetball, “lead arm” in golf, or carpentry)
- poor warm-up before practice or play
- poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- going back to an activity before proper healing, recovery, and training are done

Treatment

- Medicine
 - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be recommended. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
 - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

- Use of cold and heat
 - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.
 - Heat should not be used on a new injury but may be used before performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack or warm soak. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Orthopedic aids
 - A splint or brace to keep the wrist in one position may be used to decrease pain.
 - A counterforce brace (tennis elbow strap) may reduce pressure on the damaged tendon.
- Exercises
 - Exercises to improve flexibility and strength of the elbow and surrounding muscles will be important. These can be done at home, but often a referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be advised by your health care provider.
- Injections
 - For cases that do not improve with exercise, an injection to the area may help healing.
- Surgery
 - In rare cases, surgery may be needed to correct the problem.

How to prevent

- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Make sure equipment fits well and a coach corrects improper techniques.
- Maintain proper conditioning, wrist and forearm flexibility, muscle strength, and cardiovascular fitness.

When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at (614) 355-6000 if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 weeks, even with treatment
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

To schedule an appointment with Sports Medicine, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/sports-medicine/scheduling) or scan this code with your camera phone.

