

Elbow Pain: Tennis and Golfers Elbow

Soreness or pain at the elbow on the bony bump on the outside is called “tennis elbow”. Soreness or pain on the inside is called “golfers elbow”.

What causes golfers and tennis elbow?

Soreness and pain occur when the tendons (tough tissue that connects muscles to the bone) are stretched and irritated by repeated movement of the hand, wrist and forearm. This can cause tiny tears or inflammation in the tendon. “Tennis” and “golfer’s” elbow can also be caused by activities that are not sport related such as:

- Painting
- Computer work
- Carpentry
- Typing
- Gardening
- Knitting

What are the symptoms?

The first sign of golfers or tennis elbow is usually tenderness and pain when pressing on the epicondyles (bony bumps) on either the outside or inside of the elbow. This can progress to a dull, constant pain or sharp shooting pain. Other symptoms include:

- Pain when the wrist or hand is moved.
- Pain when lifting a heavy object.
- Pain when making a fist, gripping, or shaking hands.

How long will my recovery take?

Recovery time depends on the severity of the injury as well as factors such as your age, health and previous injuries. Mild injuries can recover in a few weeks but more severe injuries can take several months to recover.

What can I do?

Golfers and tennis elbow usually heal with rest and treatment at home. The first steps are to control your pain, eliminate or modify the activities that cause your pain, and then protect the muscle from further injury.

Pain Control

- Apply ice to your elbow 15-20 minutes 3-4 times a day.
- An elbow strap or “counterforce” brace is worn around the fullest part of the forearm muscle, just below the elbow. It eases the pressure on the tendon and spreads the force throughout your arm.

Activity Modification

- Use good posture when sitting. A slouching posture places your wrists and elbows in a poor position.
- Use a neutral wrist position for typing or tool use.
- Keep your elbows bent and close to your side when lifting objects or using tools.
- Rotate activities/tasks so you use different forearm muscles.
- Take activity breaks-whether at work, home, or playing sports.
- Do forearm stretches and relax your muscles.

Forceful gripping throughout the day can aggravate your elbow pain and slow healing. Below are suggestions that will reduce the force on your elbow and forearm muscles.

- At your desk: Modify your pen, mouse or other tools to make the grip soft, large and rough. Use pen sleeves or grippers when writing. When using a mouse keep your wrist in neutral, relax your hand, click gently, or try a trackball.
- In your car: Use a padded steering wheel cover and vary your hand position from 10 and 2 to 8 and 4.
- Using tools: Use power tools instead of hand tools where possible. Avoid using heavy vibrating tools. Use grippers or sleeves on the tools to make the grip soft, large and rough.
- Lifting objects: When lifting, use both arms and try to distribute the weight evenly. As you lift, keep the object as close to your body as possible. Carry fewer bags and make the bags lighter.
- In the kitchen: Scoot, rather than lift heavy objects. Sharpen your knives. Use both hands and keep wrists in neutral when lifting pots or draining liquids.
- Recreation: Make sure you use the correct technique for your sport and proper grip size for your equipment.

When can I return to my normal activities?

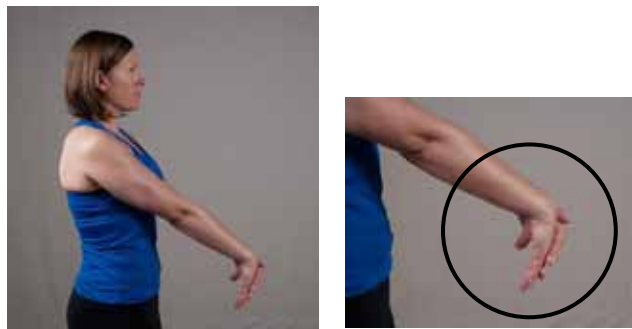
Returning to your activities depends on your symptoms and not time. There should be no swelling around your elbow and you should have full movement in your elbow, wrist and hand. You can usually return to your activities when you are able to forcefully grip things, like a tennis racquet or golf club, without pain in your elbow. Warm up your muscles before using your arm.

Stretches:

Make sure you warm up before starting to use your muscles.

Tennis Elbow (Extensor muscle) stretch:

Hold your arm out in front of you with your palm down. Drop your wrist so your fingers are pointing down. Place your other hand on top of your knuckles and gently bend your wrist to increase the stretch. Hold this position for 30 seconds. Repeat both sides.



Golfer's Elbow (Flexor muscle) stretch: Hold your arm out in front of you with your palm down. Bring your wrist up so your fingers are pointing up. Place your other hand over your palm and gently bend your wrist to increase the stretch. Hold this position for 30 seconds. Repeat both sides.



Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling, or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.