

Tennis Elbow

Tennis elbow can be defined as an overuse and muscle strain injury.

The cause is repeated contraction of the forearm muscles that you use to straighten and raise your hand and wrist. The repeated motions and stress to the tissue may result in a series of tiny tears in the tendons that attach the forearm muscle to the bony prominence at the outside of your elbow.

Who does it affect?

This can be divided into two groupings, namely by your

1. Age: normally affects people between the ages of 30 and 50 yrs. old
2. Occupation: people who have jobs that involve repetitive motion of the wrist and arm are more likely to develop tennis elbow, plumbers, painters, carpenters, butchers, cooks and tennis players.

How can I prevent tennis elbow?

There are a number of ways to prevent tennis elbow:

1. Warm up the area: a few simple stretches of those tendons/muscles around the elbow will help. By flexing your hand in the 4 directions will stretch the muscles/tendons in the hitting elbow. With your elbow straight, bend/flex the wrist towards the ground using your opposite hand, hold for 15-30 secs, repeating twice to three times. Now raise your palm towards the roof and when finished flex to your left and right and hold for 15-30 secs.
2. Your racket: Playing with a racket that is too heavy will cause an overload on the elbow muscles while too light a racket will cause too much vibration at impact. Also is your racket head too heavy? All these factors need to be taken into consideration.
3. Strings: Basically there are three types of strings; gut, multi-filament, and polyester. Gut and multi-filament will absorb more on impact compared to polyester.
4. Tennis Balls: There are two types of tennis balls, pressurised and non-pressurised. Non-pressurised would be Micro x and Tretorn plus whereas a pressurised ball would be Head ATP, Wilson, Dunlop etc. These have a softer outer shell with the core full of gases hence they lose their bounce after being opened for a few days. The non-pressurised ball i.e. the micro x have a hard outer shell and they never lose their bounce but more importantly on impact with the strings of the racket there is no softness which results in a hard impact on the elbow. All these hard impacts can result in tiny tears which can develop into a major problem. Another aspect regarding the ball is if they get wet the weight of the ball can actually double and this leads to a greater force of impact causing a greater damage to the elbow. So another way to avoid tennis elbow is to not play in wet conditions.....speak to our committee about indoor courts!!!!
5. Tension of strings: A racket re-strung at a lower tension will allow the ball to stay in the strings for longer reducing peak impact forces acting on the elbow
6. Grip size: If you use a grip that is too small, this may lead to over gripping/over tightening your hand which places further tension on those tendons in your elbow. Another factor regarding your grip, make sure it's dry, if it's wet and you have an off-centred contact this could stretch those tendons applying force to holding the racket leading to the micro tears.
7. Technique: The three most important aspects of contacting the ball i.e. contact point are (a) Correct height (b) Comfortable distance from your body and (c) in front and with regards

tennis elbow the further you contact the ball in front the less likely you are to have tennis elbow. If you contact the ball late or behind the ideal position your elbow will or may be angled or bent leading to all the forces arriving at your elbow. So proper technique is essential in this type of injury. Also your actual grip be it eastern, semi western or continental could cause or lead to problem of grip and contact height are incorrect. Try hitting more balls about your hip height and make sure that the ball is contacting the racket strings where the logo is, except if you have a Babolat racket, where the logo is at the bottom.

If you have any questions regarding this article, just ask me when you see me in the club.

Yours in sport

William Guiry