

DESCRIPTION

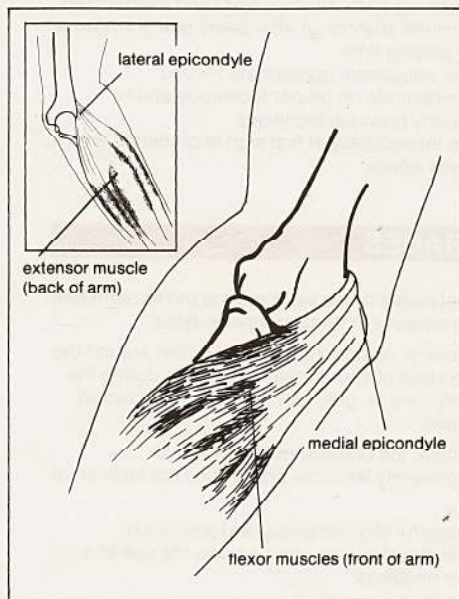
A common cause of pain in the elbow is what is commonly known as 'tennis elbow', although the injury can also occur in golf, baseball, all racquet sports, rowing, canoeing, weightlifting, hockey, wrestling and swimming, as well as a variety of occupations.

ANATOMY

There are 3 distinct bumps in the elbow joint. The largest one is on the back of the elbow and is not important in 'tennis elbow'. There are two less distinct bumps, one on the inside, called the 'medial epicondyle' and one on the outside, called the 'lateral epicondyle'.

Hence, the medical terms, 'lateral epicondylitis' when the pain is on the outside bump and 'medial epicondylitis' when the pain is on the inside bump.

Pain may also be felt in the muscles that attach to these bumps, and in fact, the muscles and their attachments are the real cause of the injury.



CAUSES

Injury occurs gradually as small injuries occur repeatedly to the same area. These small injuries may result from:

1. Anaccustomed use.
2. Improper technique (e.g. tennis elbow, leading backhand, pitching curve balls in baseball).
3. Improper or unsuitable equipment, e.g. tennis racquet – handle may be too large, the strings may be too tight, the racquet may be too heavy.
4. Lack of strength in the forearm muscles.
5. Lack of flexibility in the wrist and elbow.

These small injuries (microtrauma) may not be noticed or only give minor discomfort but over time causes gradual damage where the muscle attaches to the bone. This is when the symptoms of the injury may occur.

ANYONE FOR...GRUNT...
...TENNIS... OUCH... MOAN?



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

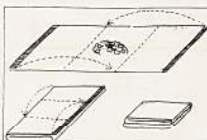
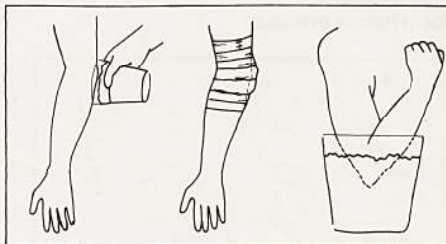
1. Pain on straightening elbow.
2. Pain when attempting to curl fingers and/or wrist (for medial epicondylitis) or straighten fingers and/or cock wrist (for lateral epicondylitis).
3. Point tenderness.
4. Inability to grasp and/or lift an object, e.g. saucepan, book, etc. or pain while doing it.

IMMEDIATE CARE

If the problem is a minor discomfort or a gradual onset of symptoms, ice alone may be used.

Ice can be applied by:

1. Ice massage – fill a styrofoam or paper cup with water and freeze overnight. Peel the paper away from the ice block and gently rub over entire area of the bone and muscle. Do this for 15 minutes.
2. Ice packs – wrap CRUSHED ice in a damp towel and wrap on to the elbow with an elastic non-adhesive bandage. Leave on for 15-20 minutes.
3. Ice immersion for 15-20 minutes.



Above: Ice massage, ice pack, ice immersion. Left: Making an ice pack.