

# Lateral Elbow Tendinopathy

**Previously known as ‘Tennis elbow’ or ‘Lateral Epicondylitis’**

**Lateral elbow tendinopathy is classified as an overuse injury of the tendons on the outside of the elbow.**

Anybody can get lateral elbow tendinopathy, but it is most common in people between the ages of 35 and 54. When a person gets this problem, one or more of the tendons in their elbow become painful.

The pain occurs at the point where the tendons of the forearm muscles attach to the bone.

Although lateral elbow tendinopathy is painful, it normally recovers; 80-90% self resolve over 1-2 years.



## Symptoms of Lateral elbow tendinopathy

The main symptom of lateral elbow tendinopathy is pain and tenderness on the outside of the elbow.

Some people may feel pain travelling down the forearm.

Symptoms can be worse with twisting movements, such as turning a door handle or opening the lid of a jar, you may also feel pain and stiffness on waking.

Different people will experience varying degrees of pain, ranging from mild discomfort when using the arm to a severe ache.



## The causes

Lateral elbow tendinopathy is thought to be caused by sensitivity of the forearm tendons due to overuse. Any new or excessive activity that involves gripping or twisting can lead to this problem.

Common causes include:

- Manual work that involves repetitive turning or lifting of the wrist such as plumbing, bricklaying, gardening or DIY.
- Repetitive, fine movements of the hand and wrist such as typing or using scissors
- Playing racket sports such as squash or tennis (less than 10% of cases)
- Sports that involve throwing such as cricket or bowles

## Treatment

Initial treatment is aimed at reducing the sensitivity of the tendon, such as:

- Avoiding the aggravating activity, or finding a different way of doing it
- A tennis elbow strap may help to ease the pain
- Anti-inflammatory tablets or gels/creams may be helpful. Painkillers may also be useful, talk to your GP or pharmacist for further information and advice
- Warmth or cold can be helpful. (An ice pack such as a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea-towel applied to the tender area for 10 minutes twice a day.

Please do not do this if your skin sensation is impaired.

Never apply ice directly to the skin as it can cause burns)



## Exercises

The aim of the exercises is to strengthen the extensor muscles, to enable them to tolerate the load needed. Aim to complete these exercises 3 to 4x days per week to allow the tendons to rest and repair.

Try starting with 5 repetitions per exercise a few times on each exercise day. Gradually increase the number of repetitions / weight as you begin to find them easier, ensuring you are not causing too much pain.

If you do not have a light weight to use, consider using a tin of food / bottle of water.

Watch the guidance video [bess.ac.uk/tennis- elbow/](https://bess.ac.uk/tennis-elbow/)

## 1. Isometric exercise

The key to this exercise is not to move the wrist through its range of motion, but instead hold it in one position whilst applying pressure with the other hand.

Progress by applying more pressure / reaching back and forth from your shoulder / elbow whilst maintaining position.



## 2. Eccentric exercise

This time, using a light weight, lower your hand down by your side with your palm facing down. Bend your elbow again but with your palm facing up.



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