

Golfer's elbow

Information for patients



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SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



What is golfer's elbow?

Golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis) is a condition causing pain and tenderness around the inner aspect of the elbow joint.

It commonly affects people who play golf (hence the name) and sports that involve throwing, such as cricket and baseball, climbing or manual workers. However, it can occur in any individual.

What causes golfer's elbow?

We do not fully understand why golfer's elbow occurs, however it is a common overuse condition affecting the common flexor tendon (this is the tendon that attaches the flexor muscles of the forearm to the inner side of the elbow joint).

The flexor muscles are the muscles that bend the fingers, which allow you to grip.

In the majority of cases, the tendon becomes painful without any serious damage and responds well to self-management.

What are the symptoms in golfer's elbow?

The usual symptoms are:

- Pain around the inner aspect of the elbow, over the bony prominence called the 'medial epicondyle'.
- Pain is commonly caused by actions that require gripping e.g. lifting with the palm up, squeezing or pulling.
- A tender spot can usually be felt over the bone and just in front of it in the tendon itself.

How can I manage it?

Most cases of golfer's elbow can be self-managed with simple things such as modification of activities, simple exercises and if necessary, painkillers.

- Massaging the elbow may help and using a topical non-steroidal anti-inflammatory gel such as ibuprofen gel may reduce the discomfort.
- Modification of activity e.g. reduced frequency or intensity of the activity causing the problem or a complete rest from it.
- Braces/clasps designed specifically to ease the symptoms of golfer's elbow are available from sports shops or online. These can help ease symptoms when active by putting pressure over the flexor tendon and muscles.

What should I do if this doesn't help or if the symptoms are severe?

- Physiotherapists can plan an individual rehabilitation programme which will focus on graded strengthening to improve your function.
- You may require investigations e.g. Ultrasound or MRI, if your elbow is not improving.
- Injections are rarely offered as there is evidence that these can increase the risk of reoccurrence and have the potential to cause damage to the tendons.
- In a small number of severe cases, surgery may be necessary, however the vast majority of cases settle with physiotherapy.

How can I avoid getting it or prevent a reoccurrence?

- Build up slowly if you are not accustomed to an activity.
- Take breaks from repetitive elbow movements and heavy lifting.
- Try to keep physically active.
- Try to keep your weight within normal limits, as individuals who are overweight have an increased risk of tendon problems.
- Try to stop smoking as this has been shown to contribute to tendon symptoms.



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