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SPORTS

Rest will help Tennis Elbow

Editor's note: *Amon Ferry, a Harvard sports medicine fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon who is certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgeons, is the new sports-medicine columnist for Republic community sections. He has extensive experience working with athletes and professional teams.*

Have you ever been told you have tennis elbow but you don't play tennis? Pain along the outside of the elbow is often referred to as tennis elbow, or in medical terms- lateral epicondylitis. The pain is caused by inflammation of the tendons (tendinitis) near the elbow and is often the result of repetitive motions that involve gripping or bending the wrist back. Not only may this condition be seen in athletes, but may result from simple activities around the house such as gardening and cleaning, or may even occur after long periods of typing on a computer.

Weak muscles and overuse are factors thought to contribute to lateral epicondylitis. When forearm muscles are weak, there is more stress on the tendon which can lead to inflammation after repetitive activity. In sports, poor technique such as jerky strokes or too much wrist motion can also lead to tendinitis.

The treatment for lateral epicondylitis is similar to that for other overuse injuries: rest, ice, and anti-inflammatory medications. While resting, avoid carrying heavy objects or any activities that cause pain. Also, applying ice 20-30 minutes two to three times per day can help



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decrease the inflammation and swelling. Stretching is also effective in improving the mobility of the muscles and can help break down scar tissue. As the pain decreases, you can begin light strengthening exercises.

When the symptoms are severe, a cortisone injection may be indicated. This will help decrease the inflammation and pain, but may not shorten the overall length of time to full recovery. That is why I like to incorporate other modalities such as a home stretching program and physical therapy to help decrease inflammation and build strength. Braces are available at most drug stores and should be worn approximately two inches below the elbow. As the pain subsides, the brace is only necessary during activities that stress the arm.

Typically your symptoms will resolve with the above treatment. When present for more than 1 year, it is reasonable to consider surgical treatment to remove the degenerative tissue and repair the tendon, but this is rarely necessary.

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