



Golfer's elbow

Overview

Golfer's elbow is a condition that causes pain where the tendons of your forearm muscles attach to the bony bump on the inside of your elbow. The pain might spread into your forearm and wrist.

Golfer's elbow is similar to tennis elbow, which occurs on the outside of the elbow. It's not limited to golfers. Tennis players and others who repeatedly use their wrists or clench their fingers also can develop golfer's elbow.

The pain of golfer's elbow doesn't have to keep you off the course or away from your favorite activities. Rest and appropriate treatment can get you back into the swing of things.

Symptoms

Golfer's elbow is characterized by:

- **Pain and tenderness.** Usually felt on the inner side of your elbow, the pain sometimes extends along the inner side of your forearm. Pain typically worsens with certain movements.
- **Stiffness.** Your elbow may feel stiff, and making a fist might hurt.
- **Weakness.** You may have weakness in your hands and wrists.
- **Numbness or tingling.** These sensations might radiate into one or more fingers — usually the ring and little fingers.

The pain of golfer's elbow can come on suddenly or gradually. The pain might worsen with certain movements, such as swinging a golf club.

When to see a doctor

Consult your doctor if rest, ice and over-the-counter pain relievers don't ease your elbow pain and tenderness. Seek immediate care if:

- Your elbow is hot and inflamed, and you have a fever
- You can't bend your elbow
- Your elbow looks deformed
- You suspect you've broken a bone

Causes

Golfer's elbow, also known as medial epicondylitis, is caused by damage to the muscles and tendons that control your wrist and fingers. The damage is typically related to excess or repeated stress — especially forceful wrist and finger motions. Improper lifting, throwing or hitting, as well as too little warmup or poor conditioning, also can contribute to golfer's elbow.

Besides golf, many activities and occupations can lead to golfer's elbow, including:

- **Racket sports.** Improper technique with tennis strokes, especially the backhand, can cause injury to the tendon. Excessive use of topspin and using a racket that's too small or heavy also can lead to injury.
- **Throwing sports.** Improper pitching technique in baseball or softball can be another culprit. Football, archery and javelin throwing also can cause golfer's elbow.
- **Weight training.** Lifting weights using improper technique, such as curling the wrists during a biceps exercise, can overload the elbow muscles and tendons.
- **Forceful, repetitive occupational movements.** These occur in fields such as construction, plumbing and carpentry

To cause golfer's elbow, the activity generally needs to be done for more than an hour a day on many days.

Risk factors

You could be at higher risk of developing golfer's elbow if you're:

- Age 40 or older
- Performing repetitive activity at least two hours a day
- Obese
- A smoker

Prevention

You can take steps to prevent golfer's elbow:

- **Strengthen your forearm muscles.** Use light weights or squeeze a tennis ball. Even simple exercises can help your muscles absorb the energy of sudden physical stress.
- **Stretch before your activity.** Walk or jog for a few minutes to warm up your muscles. Then do gentle stretches before you begin your game.
- **Fix your form.** Whatever your sport, ask an instructor to check your form to avoid overload on muscles.
- **Use the right equipment.** If you're using older golfing irons, consider upgrading to lighter graphite clubs. If you play tennis, make sure your racket fits you. A racket with a small grip or a heavy head may increase the risk of elbow problems.

- **Lift properly.** When lifting anything — including free weights — keep your wrist rigid and stable to reduce the force to your elbow.
- **Know when to rest.** Try not to overuse your elbow. At the first sign of elbow pain, take a break.

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