

Maintain Healthy Elbows this Spring

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With the arrival of spring comes our return to the great outdoors. This season is an ideal time for golf and tennis. Whether you're a novice or a seasoned athlete, these activities will allow you to accomplish your fitness goals while enjoying the warmer weather. Before you pick up your tennis racket or dust off your golf clubs, there are a few things you may want to consider so you can make this spring season healthy and enjoyable.

Have you ever taken a divot in golf or hit a hard serve in tennis? Well if so, you may be at risk for developing season ending elbow injuries. Some of the most common injuries to the elbow arise from overuse activities that involve forceful wrist and/or forearm movements. Commonly occurring in spring and summer sports, these injuries can be very painful and debilitating. Tennis and golf are two activities that require a significant amount of flexibility, strength and coordination in the upper extremities. Improper swing mechanics or the wrong equipment can increase your risk of developing pain.

Medial epicondylitis (commonly known as golfer's elbow) and lateral epicondylitis (commonly known as tennis elbow) are common overuse injuries suffered by the spring athlete. In the past it was thought that these conditions were due to inflammation in the tendons that attach to the inside/outside of the elbow. However, epicondylitis is actually caused by microtears of the tendons that occur over time. Healing can be slow if not properly treated due to the poor blood supply of these tendons.

The most common cause of lateral epicondylitis is the overuse of the muscles that are attached to the bone on the outside of the elbow. These are the muscles that pull the hand backwards known as wrist extensors. The most common cause of medial epicondylitis is the overuse of the muscles that are attached to the bone on the inside of the elbow. These are the muscles that pull the palm of the hand toward the wrist known as wrist flexors.

Tennis incorporates different shots including the backhand, forehand and serve that are all reliant upon the wrist. It is important to evaluate each shot individually to understand how these maneuvers may lead to elbow pain if performed incorrectly. Some of the more common breaks in form leading to lateral epicondylitis involve a one-handed backhand shot executed with the shoulder up and the power generated from the forearm muscles. Also, a late forearm swing resulting in bending the hand back significantly to prepare for the ball. During a serve, snapping and turning the wrist while swinging with full power increases the stress on the already taught wrist extensors. Some of the more common breaks in form leading to medial

- 1. Properly fitting equipment including club/request length, grip size**
- 2. Have mechanics evaluated by a teaching professional**
- 3. Build up slowly regarding frequency, duration, and intensity.**
- 4. Perform a full body dynamic warm up prior to play**
- 5. See a Physical Therapist for information regarding eccentric strengthening**
- 6. Seek medical attention of pain/symptoms that continue for 3 or more days**

epicondylitis include late forearm biomechanics where the player quickly snaps the wrist to bring the racket forward. Also, the cocking phase when serving, places tremendous stress on the inside tissues of the elbow.

Golf incorporates a significant amount of hip and trunk flexibility as well as core strength to decrease the stress on smaller more vulnerable muscles in the forearm and/or wrist. Epicondylitis can be caused or exacerbated by a number of problems with the golf swing. Medial injuries are typically caused by traumatic insults to the elbow. These types of injuries can be caused by striking obstructions, or hitting "fat" shots. The sudden deceleration of the club head that occurs causes excessive loading of the muscles that bend the wrist causing tendon breakdown. Lateral elbow injuries are more likely to be due to repetitive overuse. Gripping the club too tight or changing your grip can cause elbow pain. Simply practicing too much can put too much stress on the forearm musculature as well. A common error in the golf swing leading to epicondylitis involves a right-handed golfer throwing the club down at the ball with the right arm rather than pulling the club through with the left arm and trunk.

Symptoms of epicondylitis include pain and tenderness to touch of the inside or outside of the elbow. These symptoms can radiate down the wrist and are worse post-activity. Weakness of the elbow, wrist, and/or hand is also common. Refer to text box for preventative measures to help avoid these common elbow problems.

Feel free to contact your Physical Therapist at Integrated Rehabilitation Services for individualized instruction on how to prevent or alleviate elbow, wrist and shoulder pain from your spring sports activity.



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