



## MICHIGAN MEDICAL REPORT

FROM THE PHYSICIANS AT ST. JOSEPH MERCY OAKLAND

### THE FACTS ABOUT TENNIS ELBOW



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#### BACKGROUND

Tennis elbow is one of the injuries that can occur in the elbow due to overuse. This condition is associated with repetitive and strenuous use of the forearm muscle. While tennis is one activity that leads to this painful condition, so do many other activities and professions including:

- Recreational: tennis, squash, fencing and racquetball
- Professional: plumbing, painting, raking, weaving and meat cutting

The overuse of tendons leads to a degenerative condition where the fibers that are attached to the lateral side (outside) of the elbow are affected. The tendons that are affected are the same ones that secure the muscles that extend or lift the wrist and hand—making the condition very painful as the tendons continue to degenerate.

While tennis elbow can occur at any age, most patients with the condition are between 30 and 50 years old.

#### SYMPTOMS/ DIAGNOSIS

Patients normally will first feel a dim ache that grows into an intense and lasting pain. This development may take only a couple of weeks or be stretched over several months. However, the end result is the same: a burning, severe pain on the outside of the elbow.

The pain will intensify if activity is continued and may even worsen just through use and by completing everyday activities such as household chores. Additionally, most patients will feel pain if they push on the outside of their elbow.

Most cases of tennis elbow are diagnosed through a simple physical examination which may include the doctor applying pressure on the outside of the elbow or asking the patient to lift their wrist or fingers against pressure to see if that causes pain.



#### TREATMENT

“Most cases of tennis elbow can be treated without surgery,” says Jignesh Patel, DO, Orthopaedic Surgeon, SJMO. “Pain management is the first step.”

Dr. Patel suggests that in this phase, patients stop the activities that caused the pain, apply ice, take medication to prevent inflammation, and even wear an orthotic device such as a brace to rest the muscles and tendons. Approximately 90% of patients with tennis elbow can find relief through nonsurgical methods.

While conservative measures are suggested as the initial means of treatment, persistent pain may signify a need for surgery.

However, those that have experienced pain for six or more months and exhausted all of the conservative treatment methods may be surgical candidates.

The good news is that this procedure may now be done arthroscopically. It is an outpatient surgery that involves removing the diseased tendon tissue and reattaching normal tendon tissues to the bone. Since the surgery can now be completed arthroscopically, less anesthesia is required and recovery is quicker too.

#### REFERRALS

Please contact the SJMO referral line at (800) 372-6094 for an orthopaedic surgeon near you.



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