

Tennis Elbow – Who Needs It?

By Laurel J. Freeman, B.A., L.M.T

I do not believe anyone wants pain, likes pain, or has to live with pain. So let's talk about tennis elbow.

What exactly is tennis elbow? Turn your thumb inward toward your body. There is a muscle that starts above the elbow on the outside and runs across the top of your lower arm. It hooks to the wrist on the inside by your thumb. This muscle is called the extensor carpi radialis brevis. You can also feel it if you squeeze your hand and many times this muscle will pop up. When the tendon of this muscle becomes aggravated or over used a person can develop Tennis Elbow.

What is a tendon? Tendons hold the muscle to the bone and are very strong. However, when they tear scar tissue is formed weakening the integrity of the muscle spindle. Tendons do not heal well because the blood supply is limited.

What causes this particular tendon to become aggravated? Most of the time, Tennis Elbow is caused by stress, overuse, or by the way in which you stroke the ball.

What can you do about it? You have several ways to take care of this situation.

Rest is the best step to take first, but do not stop there. **Ice** should be used as often as possible.

Why use ice? Ice is used to help release metabolites (waste products). When you use ice there are four sensations you will feel - **cold, burning, aching**, and **numbness**. When your arm reaches the numbness stage (10-20 minutes), take the ice off. Get a tennis ball

and squeeze 6 to 10 time for three sets. Then repeat the ice and the exercise. If possible, do this 2 to 3 times each night. There are several other exercises that can be done in addition to the tennis ball squeeze but this one is very effective.

How long should this be continued? You should see some positive results within 4 to 6 weeks. If you are continuing to play tennis while you are still having discomfort, realize the tendon will take longer to heal and may never fully recover. If you have had chronic (long term) Tennis Elbow it may take even longer to heal.

What other alternatives are there? Massage is wonderful for Tennis Elbow and can be used in conjunction with ice. Injections with a corticosteroid can be an effective treatment after all else fails. We are fortunate in Gainesville to have many qualified Orthopedic physicians, so if the pain still persists, see one. Many times the vibration of the strings on your racquet can cause the irritation so see your Tennis Pro for a recommendation.

Remember, you do not have to live with pain!

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