Elbow Pain

Definition

Elbow pain or tenderness may be caused by a traumatic or overuse injury. This may include aching or other discomfort in the elbow that is not related to direct injury.

Causes

Elbow tendinitis, an inflammation and injury to the tendons - soft tissues attaching muscle to bone.

People who play racquet sports are most likely to injure the tendons on the outside of the elbow. This condition is commonly called tennis elbow. Golfers are more likely to injure the tendons on the inside of the elbow.

Other common causes of elbow tendinitis are playing baseball or overusing your wrist and arm.

Other common causes of elbow pain are:

- Bursitis - inflammation of a fluid-filled cushion beneath the skin
- Arthritis - narrowing of the joint space and loss of cartilage in the elbow
- Elbow strains
- Infection of the elbow

First Aid

- Apply ice up to 15 minutes every hour for the first day. Continue to apply ice every 3-4 hours for up to 3 days. Wrap the ice in a cloth, but do not apply ice directly to the skin.
- Wrap the elbow with a bandage, such as an ACE bandage, to keep the elbow immobilized.
- Keep the elbow elevated above your heart, if possible.
- Give the elbow joint complete rest for at least 2 days. DO NOT return to the activity that caused the problem for at least 3 weeks. Then, gradually strengthen the muscles around your elbow. A physical therapist can teach you how to do this.
- While you are resting the joint, take pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- After the initial rest period, you should begin to gradually strengthen the muscles around the elbow through gentle flexibility exercises.

For more information, or to contact one of our Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons, email us at SportsMedicine@amitahealth.org or call us at 847.385.7120 or 708.245.6051

AMITAhealth.org/SportsMedicine
The AMITA Health Orthopedics Institute is a national leader in musculoskeletal care, offering comprehensive and advanced care for a wide range of conditions. We are proactive about keeping you active. That is why our multi-disciplinary orthopedic teams enlist a comprehensive leading edge approach to the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal injuries.

Our team of highly-experienced board-certified physicians, surgeons, therapists and nurses are dedicated to providing patients of all ages with a personalized treatment program that is customized for your condition, lifestyle and personal preferences.

We work hard to prevent sports-related injuries, which have become increasingly more common among athletes, especially children. AMITA Health Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons keep kids active and participating in the extracurricular activities they enjoy by delivering educational programs and support for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic care.

When to Contact a Medical Professional
- You have prolonged tendinitis that does not improve with home care.
- Pain is due to direct elbow injury.
- There is obvious deformity.
- You are unable to use the elbow.
- You have a fever or swelling and redness of your elbow.

Prevention
- Reduce the activity that causes the pain.
- Warm-up slowly. Stretch the forearm before, during and after exercise.
- Use an “elbow sleeve” to help keep your arm warm while playing.
- Tennis: use the correct grip size, a two-handed backhand and proper tension racquet strings.
- Perform regular stretching and strengthening exercises.

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