The Ultimate Guide to Tennis Elbow: Symptoms, Therapies, and Recovery

Tennis elbow, a common condition causing pain and inflammation in the elbow, often arises from repetitive motions like twisting or swinging your lower arm extensively. This repetitive stress can damage the tendon connecting your forearm muscles to your elbow. Fortunately, most people experience improvement within a few months with rest and nonsurgical treatments. Healthcare providers sometimes refer to tennis elbow as lateral epicondylitis.



What is Tennis Elbow?

Tennis elbow, a repetitive strain injury, is a frequent cause of elbow pain. Repetitive strain injuries develop when a specific body part is repeatedly subjected to the same motion, eventually leading to tissue damage.

While the name suggests a sports-related injury, experts estimate that over 90% of people with tennis elbow don’t acquire it from playing tennis or other sports. It occurs due to overuse of the tendon connecting your forearm muscles to your elbow (extensor muscle tendon). Medically, **tennis elbow** is known as lateral epicondylitis. “Epicondylitis” signifies inflammation in the extensor muscle tendon, and “lateral” indicates the inflammation is on the lateral side – the outer

edge when your arms are at your sides with palms facing forward, aligned with your eyes.

Any motion requiring frequent gripping, twisting, and swinging of the forearm can trigger tennis elbow. If you experience an elbow injury or persistent pain that doesn't improve on its own within a week, consult a healthcare provider. Early diagnosis can enhance your treatment options and effectiveness.

How Common is Tennis Elbow?

Tennis elbow is a leading cause of elbow pain, with experts estimating that around 3% of the Indian population experiences it annually. Despite its name, experts estimate that over 90% of people with tennis elbow don't develop it from playing tennis or other sports.

What are Tennis Elbow Symptoms?

The most common **tennis elbow symptoms** include:

- **Elbow pain** (especially on the outside of your elbow – the side furthest away from the center of your body when your arms are at your sides with your palms facing forward).
- **Stiffness**
- **Swelling**
- **A weakened grip** (especially when you're trying to hold something like a racket, pen or shake someone's hand).

How do you know if you have a tennis elbow?

A definitive diagnosis of tennis elbow requires a visit to a healthcare provider. Many people with tennis elbow experience a specific type of pain in their elbow and arm. The pain typically feels:

- Sharp or burning
- Worse when you twist or bend your arm (like turning a doorknob, opening a jar or swinging your arm)

- Radiating from your elbow down to your forearm and into your wrist (especially at night).

Does tennis elbow affect one or both arms?

Most people develop tennis elbow in their dominant arm (the side you naturally use for most activities). You're most likely to have a tennis elbow in whichever arm you use the most for a repetitive activity – the arm you hold a racket or tools with. Development of tennis elbow in both arms simultaneously is less common but possible.

What causes tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow isn't just caused by playing tennis! It can develop from any repetitive motion that strains your elbow. Over time, this repeated stress adds up, like tiny tears (microtraumas) accumulating in your extensor muscle tendon. These microtraumas eventually reach a point where they cause noticeable pain and symptoms.

While less frequent, a sudden injury to your arm or elbow can also trigger tennis elbow.

What are the risk factors?

Anyone can develop **tennis elbow**, but some people are more likely to, including those who:

- Lift more than 45 pounds (22 kilograms) regularly
- Are older than 40
- Smoke
- Have obesity (a body mass index, or BMI, of 30 or higher)

Athletes who play sports that put stress on their arms or elbows, including:

- Tennis (and other racket sports like squash, pickleball or racquetball)
- Baseball
- Softball

- Bowling
- Golf
- Weight lifting

People whose jobs or hobbies put lots of stress on their elbows, including:

- Painters
- Musicians
- Chefs or cooks
- Carpenters
- Plumbers
- Cleaners
- Gardeners
- Manicurists

Diagnosis and Tests

How do providers diagnose tennis elbow?

To diagnose tennis elbow, your healthcare provider will conduct a physical examination of your elbow and ask you questions about your symptoms. Be prepared to share details about:

- When you first noticed pain, stiffness, or other symptoms.
- Any activities that seem to worsen or improve your symptoms.
- Your overall medical history.

In some cases, additional tests like X-rays, ultrasounds,Electromyography (EMG), or MRIs,Management and Treatment might be used to rule out other potential causes of your elbow pain. Early diagnosis allows for prompt treatment, promoting a faster and more complete recovery.

What are tennis elbow treatments?

Tennis elbow, while not exclusive to tennis players, can

significantly impact your daily life. But fear not! There are numerous treatment options available to help your injured tendon heal. Here's a breakdown of some of the most effective **tennis elbow treatments** approaches:

RICE – The Foundation of Healing:

- **Rest:** The cornerstone of **tennis elbow recovery** is giving your elbow a break from the activity that caused the pain. Minimize using your injured elbow to allow it to heal properly.
- **Ice:** Apply a cold compress or ice pack to your elbow for 15-20 minutes at a time, several times a day. Wrap the ice pack in a towel to prevent direct skin contact.
- **Compression:** A compression bandage wrapped around your elbow can help reduce swelling and promote healing. Your healthcare provider can instruct you on safe and effective application.
- **Elevation:** Whenever possible, keep your elbow elevated above the level of your heart. This helps reduce swelling and discomfort.

Beyond RICE: Additional Therapies for Relief

In addition to the RICE method, your healthcare provider may recommend other **tennis elbow therapies** to address your specific needs:

- **Pain Relief Medications:** Over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen can help manage pain and inflammation. However, consult your doctor before taking any medication for more than 10 consecutive days.
- **Physical Therapy:** A **physical therapy for tennis elbow** can design a personalized program consisting of stretches and exercises to strengthen the muscles around your elbow and improve flexibility, ultimately aiding in healing and preventing future injury.
- **Bracing:** Wrist or elbow braces can provide support and

stability to your elbow joint, allowing the tendon to rest and heal more effectively. Your doctor will recommend the appropriate brace type and wear schedule.

- **Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) Therapy:** This treatment involves injecting a concentrated platelet solution derived from your own blood into the injured area. Platelets promote tissue healing, potentially accelerating the recovery process this is the **best therapy for tennis elbow**
- **Corticosteroid Injections:** Corticosteroids are powerful anti-inflammatory medications that your doctor might inject directly into your elbow to reduce inflammation and pain. However, this treatment is not as common as others due to potential limitations in pain relief, especially for chronic cases.
- **Tenotomy:** In rare instances, a minimally invasive procedure called tenotomy might be employed. It involves using ultrasound guidance to insert a needle and break down damaged tissue within the tendon, stimulating the body's natural healing process.
- **Shockwave Therapy:** This non-invasive treatment involves directing specific pressure waves to the injured tendon area. The shockwaves are believed to promote tissue healing and potentially accelerate recovery.

Tennis elbow surgery

The good news is that **Tennis elbow surgery** isn't usually necessary for tennis elbow. Most people experience significant improvement with conservative treatments after a few months. However, if your symptoms persist despite conservative measures, your doctor might recommend surgery to remove damaged tissue and repair your tendon. Thankfully, most tennis elbow surgeries are outpatient procedures, allowing you to return home the same day.

How soon after treatment will I feel better?

The path to **Tennis elbow recovery** varies depending on the

severity of your injury and how long you've experienced pain. You should start feeling some relief as soon as you begin resting your elbow and avoiding the activity that triggered the pain. However, complete healing can take several months. Be sure to discuss your specific recovery timeline with your doctor.

How can I prevent tennis elbow?

Prevention is Key: Protecting Your Elbows

The best defense against tennis elbow is preventing overuse of your arm and elbow. Here are some practical tips to incorporate into your daily routine, especially during sports and physical activities:

- **Proper Equipment:** Ensure you wear the right protective gear recommended for your specific work, sport, or hobby.
- **Listen to Your Body:** Avoid pushing through pain during or after physical activity.
- **Rest and Recovery:** Allow your body adequate time to rest and recover after intense workouts.
- **Warm-Up and Cool Down:** Always stretch and warm up before engaging in sports or exercise, and don't forget to cool down and stretch afterwards.
- **Targeted Exercises:** Consider incorporating sport-specific exercises or exercises that strengthen and condition your body for your chosen activities

What can I expect if I have tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow typically requires a break from the activities that caused it. In some cases, you might need to completely stop certain activities or modify them (like wearing a brace while working or taking more frequent breaks). The vast majority of people with **tennis elbow symptoms** make a full recovery, and you should be able to resume your usual activities once your tendon heals, even if surgery is necessary.

How long tennis elbow lasts

The duration of tennis elbow recovery can range from a few months to over a year. While the average Tennis elbow surgery recovery time is around six months, some individuals may require a longer healing period, up to 18 months. Several factors influence your recovery timeline, including:

- The cause of your tennis elbow
- The extent of tendon damage
- The specific treatments you receive

When should I see my healthcare provider?

If you suspect an elbow injury or experience any of the following signs of tennis elbow, consult a healthcare provider:

- Difficulty moving your elbow or arm
- Elbow swelling or discoloration
- Severe pain that hinders daily activities (including sleep)
- Persistent pain lasting longer than a week

Questions for Your Doctor:

- What caused my tennis elbow?
- Do I need any tests?
- What treatment options are available?
- Will I require surgery?
- How should I modify my daily routine?

How do you know if you have tennis elbow or tendonitis?

Tendinitis refers to inflammation or irritation in a tendon, causing swelling. Technically, if you have tennis elbow, you also have tendinitis. It’s not a separate condition, but rather a way healthcare providers might describe the underlying cause of your elbow pain.

Some people with tennis elbow might actually have tendinosis, a condition involving degeneration of the tendon due to

microscopic tears. Regardless of the specific cause of your elbow pain, it’s important to see a doctor for prompt diagnosis and treatment.

What’s the difference between a tennis elbow and golfer’s elbow?

Tennis elbow and golfer’s elbow are closely related conditions, both stemming from overuse injuries due to repetitive arm and elbow motion.

Tennis elbow affects the extensor muscle tendon on the outer (lateral) side of your elbow. Golfer’s elbow, also known as medial epicondylitis, targets the tendon on the inner (medial) side of your elbow.

Meet Dr. Ashish Singh, **best orthopedic surgeon in Patna** specializing in treating tennis elbow. With extensive experience in **orthopedic care**, Dr. Ashish Singh at AIOR-AJRC , Center of Excellence in Orthopedics offers comprehensive treatments, including surgery when necessary, to alleviate tennis elbow symptoms effectively. His expertise ensures personalized care, guiding patients through conservative therapies to advanced surgical interventions with precision and care.

For expert consultation and tailored treatment plans, schedule your appointment with Dr. Ashish Singh today to start your journey towards recovery.

Conclusion

Discover effective strategies for managing tennis elbow, whether through conservative treatments like RICE therapy, physical therapy, or surgical options. Understand the factors influencing recovery times and when to seek medical attention. Stay informed about prevention techniques to safeguard against future occurrences. For a detailed understanding of tennis elbow, explore our comprehensive guide today.

Book Your Appointment with Best Orthopedic surgeon Dr Ashish Singh today!