

# Tennis Elbow (Lateral Epicondylitis)

## Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



View our other **MSK Physiotherapy** resources

[www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

## What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow is also known as lateral epicondylitis. It is a common condition that causes pain on the outside of your elbow. It happens when the tendon that joins your forearm muscles to your elbow become sore from overuse.

You do not need to play tennis to get tennis elbow. Many people develop it from everyday activities like repetitive gripping, lifting or twisting movements.

Tennis elbow can be painful but is not dangerous. Most people get better with time, exercise and small changes to their daily activities.

Common symptoms:

- pain on the outside of the elbow
- pain when gripping, lifting or twisting (for example, opening jars or bottles)
- weakness when lifting or gripping
- pain that can spread down the forearm

## Why does it happen?

Tennis elbow often occurs when the muscles in the forearm have been exposed to a change in load. 'Load' refers to the force we place on the muscles and tendons.

A muscle and tendons' ability to cope with this load is called its 'capacity'. If the load is bigger than the capacity, this can cause pain. This process is often gradual and develops slowly over time but can occur more quickly in response to a specific activity.

Common contributing factors include:

- a sudden increase in activity (e.g. sport or DIY)
- repetitive gripping/lifting
- playing lots of racquet sports
- prolonged computer/mouse use
- reduced strength in your forearm muscles
- long periods of inactivity or deconditioning

## Self-help

Management focuses on calming the pain and slowly building strength so you can return to normal activities.

Helpful strategies include:

### **Activity modification**

Try to reduce or change movements that make the pain worse. This is usually only needed for a short time.

### **Keeping the elbow moving**

Avoid complete rest. Gentle movement helps the elbow stay flexible.

## **Graded strengthening exercises**

Exercises that slowly build strength in your forearm are the best way to improve your symptoms. Start gently and increase gradually.

## **Pain management**

Heat (i.e. hot water bottles) or ice (i.e. frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel) can help reduce pain. If needed, speak to a pharmacist or GP about pain relief.

## **Tennis Elbow Clasp**

Using a tennis elbow 'clasp' may give some short-term relief during activities.

## Exercises

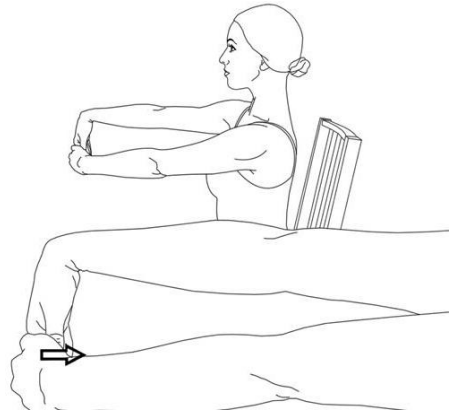
The following exercises are a good starting point.

You may feel a stretch or mild discomfort, but this should settle after you stop.

### Wrist Flexion Stretch

Use your hand to bend your own wrist.

Make sure you keep your wrist relaxed.



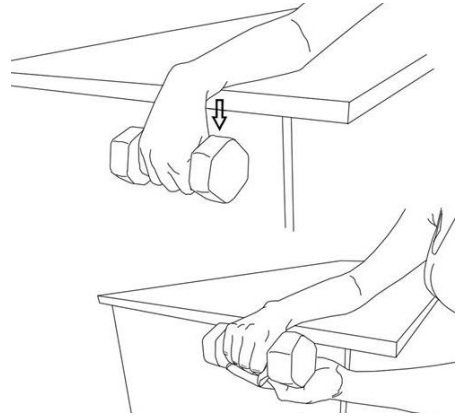
**Hold 10 secs | Repeat 3 times | Perform 2 to 3 times daily**

Access a video of this exercise below (digital leaflet only):

[Rehab My Patient: Wrist Flexion Stretch](#)

## Eccentric Wrist Strengthening

Rest your arm on a table with your palm facing down. Hold a dumb bell / weight / bottle / can.



Lift your hand upwards using your other hand.

With a controlled movement, slowly lower your hand back down.

At the bottom, repeat by lifting your own hand upwards again, and letting the weight pull your hand back down.

**Repeat 10 times | Perform 2 to 3 times daily**

Access a video of this exercise below (digital leaflet only):

[Rehab My Patient: Eccentric Wrist Extension Strengthening](#)

## How long does it take to improve?

Tennis elbow takes time to settle.

Most people notice improvement after 8-12 weeks of doing the right exercises and making small activity changes.

Some cases take longer, especially if the pain has been

there for many months. Sticking with your exercises and returning to activity slowly gives the best results.

## When should I seek further help?

Speak to a GP or Physiotherapist if:

- pain becomes severe or significantly worsens
- pain is worsening despite changing your activity levels
- your symptoms are showing no signs of improvement
- you develop numbness, weakness or symptoms spreading down the arm

## Remember

Tennis elbow is a very common cause of elbow pain.

It is usually caused by overuse, not by significant damage.

Strengthening exercises are the most effective treatment.

Most people improve with time, exercise and small activity changes.

## Acknowledgements



Images used with kind permission from [www.rehabmypatient.com](http://www.rehabmypatient.com)

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



## MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

[www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/)



## Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources [www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

[physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

Date implemented: May 2026

Last review: May 2026

Review date: May 2028

Leaflet Reference. CHS MSK 17 Tennis Elbow Edition 1