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ELBOW PAIN: Do you play tennis or golf?

Presented by:

When painful symptoms show up in your elbow, one of the first things your chiropractor will ask is whether you play tennis or golf. Why?

Because of the nature of these two sports, there is a lot of strain placed on the elbows of these athletes. The tennis 'back-hand' will put a lot of stress on the extensors of the wrist, leading to potential strain and irritation of the common extensor tendon attached at the outside part of the elbow. Conversely, the golf swing can strain the flexors of the wrist, which attach via the common flexor tendon to the inside part of the elbow - especially if the person is in the habit of taking a big 'divot', or repetitively striking the ground hard when hitting the golf ball. In fact, these injuries are so common in people who play tennis and golf that elbow pain has been labeled Tennis Elbow or Golfer's Elbow, depending upon which side of the joint the symptoms show up.

Either situation will lead to inflammation and pain at the site where the tendons attach to the bone (diagnosis: tendinitis). As a result, you may feel some swelling and tenderness in the area of the injury.

The pain is usually dull, achy and constant, but if you try to grip something with your hand, it usually will become more sharp and localized. The first thing you should do is intermittently apply ice to reduce the inflammation. In addition, rest and avoiding any activity that aggravates the symptoms is recommended.

What if you don't play one of these sports? Is this the only thing that can cause symptoms in the elbow? Absolutely not. A name is just a name. There are many different reasons why you might be suffering from pain in your elbow.

QUESTION:

Which of the following activities can cause tendinitis?

- A) Gardening
- B) Golf
- C) Tennis
- D) All of the above

ANSWER:

D) All of the above

TRUE OR FALSE:

The common extensor tendon is attached to the inside part of the elbow.

ANSWER:

False – it is attached to the outside part of the elbow

QUESTION:

Which of the following bones are not part of the elbow joint?

- A) Humerus
- B) Scapula
- C) Radius

ANSWER:

B) Scapula or shoulder blade

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Just because you don't play golf or tennis, this does not mean you don't have one of these conditions. Painful tendinitis can be caused by any repetitive activity involving flexion/extension or twisting of the wrist and elbow. Throwing a ball for your dog, working in the garden, painting a wall or a fence - these are all common, non sport-related activities that could lead to tendinitis in the elbow and they should be treated the same: ice and rest. In the long-term, of course stretching and strengthening the area may help prevent the problem from recurring. However, whenever inflammation is present, one should be cautious about placing any load on a tissue that is already injured.

Sometimes, pain in the elbow is not related to stress and strain of tendons - instead, an irritation of nerves that pass by the elbow could be the cause of your discomfort. The two main nerves that travel through this area are the *ulnar* and *median nerves*.



The tricky thing about nerves is that no matter where the source of irritation is - local (a peripheral nerve) or where they exit the spine (as a nerve root) - the pain can be felt at any point along the nerve. This is why it is important to have your chiropractor assess the problem. Your chiropractor will be careful to look at your neck to assess your cervical spine for vertebral subluxations or disc herniations that may be pinching/irritating the nerve roots corresponding to nerves leading to the elbow. If performing orthopedic tests on your neck reproduces the pain in your elbow, the condition is more likely to be labeled *radiculopathy* rather than tendinitis.

Chiropractic adjustments are often very helpful in reducing radicular symptoms, sometimes in as little as one or two treatments! Of course, you should always have your spine checked regularly, in an effort to prevent symptoms, too.

Finally, the elbow joint itself should be assessed. The elbow is comprised of three bones, namely the *humerus* (the upper arm), plus the *ulna* and *radius* (the 2 forearm bones). Each one of these bones will articulate with the other two, forming joints. Trauma, infection, or repetitive stress and strain - any of these causative factors can create joint subluxation or pathology.

Luckily, your chiropractor is a joint specialist! After reviewing the presentation of your symptoms, and all the possible causes, your chiropractor will determine the best course of action to alleviate your pain.

Quote to Inspire

“Tennis and golf are best played, not watched.”

Roger Kahn



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