Tennis Elbow / Golfer's Elbow

What is it?

Tennis elbow and golfer's elbow are common names for two different but similar overuse injuries of the elbow. Both occur when the tendons of the elbow are stressed and overworked, typically by repetitive motions, such as swinging a golf club or a tennis racquet. Despite the names, you do not have to play tennis or golf to have either of these conditions.

Natural History

Tennis elbow occurs when the tendons of the forearm that attach to the outside of the elbow become inflamed. The medical name for tennis elbow is lateral epicondylitits. **Golfer's elbow,** is when the tendons of the forearm that attach to the inside of the elbow become inflamed. The medical name for golfer's elbow is medial epicondylitis. Patients with both conditions experience pain and tenderness where the tendon attaches to the elbow, and the pain sometimes radiates down the forearm. Patients generally have a hard time with sports that require repetitive arm movements such as lifting weights or swinging a club or racquet. Patients with more extreme forms of tennis and golfer's elbow may have pain when performing everyday activities such as picking up a cup of coffee, shaking hands, and turning a doorknob.

Treatment Options

Fortunately, both tennis and golfer's elbow are hardly ever permanent problems. The large majority of cases are resolved with conservative treatments such as:

1) Rest: in order to allow the inflammation to decrease it is recommended that patients refrain from performing any aggravating, painful activities.

2) Anti-inflammatory medications: taking an over-the-counter or prescription anti-inflammatory medication for 2-3 weeks can help decrease inflammation of the affected area.

3) Elbow brace: wearing a tight elbow brace can take pressure off the inflamed tissues and allow them to heal more quickly.

4) Cortisone injection: your doctor may suggest a cortisone shot to the affected area. Cortisone is an anti-inflammatory medication that can be injected locally.