

Common Tennis Injuries

Introduction: Tennis can be a very high impact and demanding sport. No matter what your skill level of play is, the repetitive movements and constant stop and go motions put great demands on your body and put you at risk for an injury. Four of the most common injuries seen in tennis players include:

Lateral Epicondylitis: Lateral epicondylitis is commonly known as tennis elbow. This chronic overuse injury is the most frequently seen among tennis players. It is caused by inflammation and small tears of the forearm musculature and tendons on the lateral side (outside) of the elbow. Players with poor technique, lack of forearm strength and a strength imbalance between the wrist extensor muscles and flexor muscles are prone to this injury. Improper body positioning, late strokes and “wristy” impacts place too much stress on the elbow and wrist joints.

Symptoms:

Point tenderness or pain on the outer side of the elbow
Pain when you straighten or raise your wrist and hand
Pain with gripping objects or with backhand strokes
Increased pain by lifting a heavy object
Pain with making a fist, shaking hands, or turning door handles
Pain that shoots from the elbow down into the forearm or into the upper arm

Treatment: Treatment generally involves rest, ice, compression and elevation (RICE). Your doctor may also prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to alleviate pain and swelling. Lateral epicondyle bracing is also used to help support the affected extremity. Chronic conditions may result in decreased playing time, physical therapy and possibly surgery.

Tips to Prevent Injury:

Proper racquet selection and grip size play a significant role in preventing tennis elbow. The best way to choose your grip size is to measure the distance from the crease of your palm to the tip of your ring finger
String tension should be at the manufacturer's lowest recommendation because excessive string tightness requires the forearm muscles to exert more force which can lead to lateral epicondylitis
Try to choose a stiffer graphite-type racquet with a larger head. This will assist in expanding the impact area
Warm-up before playing. Gently stretch your elbow and arm muscles before and after exercises.

Rotator Cuff Tendinitis: Tendinitis is the second most common injury seen among tennis players. This injury is a result from repeated overhead and inward rotation movements of the arm. Players that serve with their arm at a 90-degree angle from their side are at a greater risk of developing tendonitis.

Symptoms:

Pain over the anterior (front) and lateral (outside) aspects of the shoulder with overhead motion
Shoulder weakness
Loss of shoulder movement, especially overhead

Treatment: Conservative treatment would consist of decreased playing time, range of motion and gradual muscle strengthening exercises. Rest, ice and NSAIDs are also beneficial. If symptoms

persist for more than 7 to 10 days of this treatment, you should see your physician for an evaluation.

Tips to Prevent Injury:

Change your technique to increase the angle between your arm and your side to more than 90-degrees.

Try to avoid overuse of the extremity, allow one to two days rest between playing

Begin an exercise regimen that focuses on flexibility and strengthening exercises for the shoulder as well as scapular stabilization exercises

III. Patella Tendinitis: Patella tendonitis, also known as jumpers knee, is pain in the band of tissue (patellar tendon) that connects the kneecap (patella) to the shin bone (tibia).

Activities such as tennis place repeated stress on the patellar tendon, causing it to be inflamed.

Symptoms:

Pain and tenderness around the patellar tendon

Swelling in your knee joint

Swelling where the patellar tendon attaches to the tibia

Pain with bending or straightening the leg

Tenderness behind the knee cap

Treatment: Ice packs should be applied for 20-30 minutes every three to four hours for two to three days or until the pain subsides. Your doctor may prescribe NSAIDs and/or place you in a patella tendon strap or special knee brace. The strap or brace will support your patellar tendon, preventing it from becoming overused or painful. Therapeutic exercises may also be prescribed to help strengthen the thigh muscles and prevent a chronic injury from occurring.

Tips for Preventing Injury:

The best way to prevent patella tendonitis is to have strong thigh muscles

When you exercise, wear shoes that fit properly

Make sure to wear shoes that are specific for your sport

Gently stretch before and after exercise

Avoid activities which may aggravate the patellofemoral joint such as squatting, deep knee bends, excessive stair or hill climbing, etc.

IV. Ankle Sprains: Ankle sprains occur when you twist your ankle.

Your foot usually turns in or under but may sometimes turn to the outside. Sprains are classified by three grades depending upon the severity of the injury. Sprains may also be classified as mild or severe.

Grade I: Grade I ankle sprains generally cause pain and there is minimal damage done to the ligaments.

Grade II: More ligament damage occurs and there is mild looseness in the joint.

Grade III: Complete tearing of the ligaments and the joint is very loose or unstable.

Symptoms:

Mild aching to sudden pain

Swelling

Discoloration

Inability to move the ankle properly

Pain in the ankle, even without putting weight on it

Treatment: The most effective treatment for ankle sprains is to rest, ice, compress and elevate (RICE) during the first 24-36 hours. Ice packs should be applied for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours. When elevating, try to keep your ankle above the level of your heart. Wrap an elastic bandage (ACE wrap) around your ankle beginning at your toes and working your way up to your knee to keep the swelling from getting worse. Anti-inflammatory or pain medications may be prescribed by your physician.

Tips for Preventing Injury:

Wear proper, well-fitting shoes

Stretch gently before and after exercise

Wear an ankle brace or tape your ankles, especially if you have had a previous injury

Perform ankle exercises to improve your ankle strength and range of motion