

**Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)**

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## Tennis Elbow

### A patient's guide

**Whittington Health**  
Magdala Avenue  
London  
N19 5NF  
Phone: 020 7272 3070

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## Exercises for the early stages

Doing the exercises should not be painful.

From a scale from 0-10 (with 0 being no pain at all, and 10 being the worst possible pain you can imagine), you should expect to experience no more than 3, and keep that as your threshold. You should expect this to subside within the following 24 hours.

### Early Stage

To begin the rehabilitation of your elbow, you can start with avoiding the activities the reproduce your pain

### Middle stage

#### Exercise 1



Starting position:  
Anchor the theraband  
under your foot (same  
side as your painful  
elbow)

Wrap the theraband around the palm of your hand (on the painful side) and between your ring and middle finger and make a gentle fist, whereby your thumb is facing the ceiling.

With elbow at a 90° right angle and hold the position for as long as you can, aiming between 30-60 seconds x 3 repetitions with a few seconds rest between each repetition. Complete once per day or 3x/week if very irritable or if you have high levels of pain.

### Later stages

If exercise 1 is pain-free, progress to exercise 2.



Starting position: As above  
but this time with the palm  
of your hand facing the  
ground.

With elbow at a 90° right angle hold the position for as long as you can, aiming between 30-60 seconds x 3 repetitions with a few seconds rest between each repetition. Complete once per day or 3x/week if very irritable or if you have high levels of pain.

If exercise 2 is pain-free, progress to exercise 3 (below).



Starting position: As above with  
the palm of your hand facing the  
ground and start extending the  
elbow, with the aim of fully  
extending your elbow (as shown  
in the left picture)

Hold the position for as long as you can, aiming between 30-60 seconds x 3 repetitions with a few seconds rest between each repetition. Complete once per day or 3x/week if very irritable or if you have high levels of pain.

If you start to feel forearm or elbow pain, go back to bending the elbow to a position that is just pain-free.

**When these exercises have become pain free, you can make this harder by increasing the resistance on the theraband.**

## What is Tennis Elbow

It is an overload or overuse of the tendons that attach at the bony part of your elbow on the outer aspect. It is common in those who are active, and those less active who may have enjoyed a sudden bout of activity, or noticed the symptoms arise gradually.

Tennis elbow is a condition that causes pain, sometimes swelling at the outside part of your elbow, and while it is not serious, it can be very painful. You might report that it is affecting your lifestyle and the ability to do the simple things like carrying shopping bags

*If you are experiencing any additional signs or symptoms – including but not limited to; numbness, pins and needles or weakness in the arm - it is advised you have a review with a medical professional.*

## What can you do manage it?

There are different strategies that can be used to tackle tennis elbow. If your pain is very irritable, and you find even simple activities like carrying the kettle painful then you may find that rest and ice and appropriate pain relief are most beneficial at this stage.

***If your pain has just developed, give it 6-8 weeks rest.*** After this time, if your elbow is no better than it is time to exercise and strengthen your tendons.

## Relative rest

Relative rest means to refrain from activities **that place further stress on the tendon** and disturb the healing process, and will prevent the tendon from healing naturally.

For tennis elbow this means avoiding the aggravating activities and elbow positions that cause your symptoms. Carry objects with your palms up and carry objects close to your body.

*There should be no pain when you perform your exercises.*

## Simple pain relief

Paracetamol or anti-inflammatories tablets such as ibuprofen or naproxen, or anti-inflammatory gel can help manage the pain initially.

We advise you consult with your local pharmacist, who can advise you on what medication may be more beneficial for you, and a specific dose. Alternatively, please follow the instructions on the packet.

## Ice therapy

Ice applications can help manage the pain and the swelling, especially around times of increased discomfort.

You can use an ice pack, or simply wrap some ice cubes or a packet of frozen peas into a damp tea towel.

Apply for 15 minutes maximum up to 4 times a day as needed.

**Note:** Do not use if you have any circulatory/vascular conditions or reduced sensation/numbness.

## Tennis elbow brace



Using a tennis elbow brace to offload the tendons can be helpful during periods of increased irritability or activity.