



TENNIS Elbow SYNDROME



By A.J. Mencias, MD

Tennis elbow, a.k.a. lateral epicondylitis, affects thousands of Americans daily. It is a condition characterized by sharp and burning pain over the outside of the elbow. The pain is usually focal and is sometimes characterized as a “tearing” sensation. It is worsened by activities that require repetitive gripping, lifting, or pulling with the palm pointing towards the ground and the elbow extended or straight out. It is actually quite rare to see someone with this problem who actually plays tennis!

Typically patients present to their doctor with a several week or month history of lateral elbow pain. Sometimes there is a definite aggravating activity that has brought on the pain, for example: running a screw gun for 10-12 hours a day for several weeks. Obviously, the best treatment is stopping the aggravating activity followed by relative resting and protection of the arm for a few weeks. Ice, compression, elevation, anti-inflammatory medications, and even physical therapy modalities

like electrical stimulation can help. Cortisone steroid injections help temporarily, but more than 2 or 3 injections can cause significant harm by weakening tissues around the elbow.

Surgery for tennis elbow is undertaken only when activity modifications and conservative measures have failed to relieve pain after a period of at least 3-6 months. Surgery for tennis elbow can be performed in an open fashion or even arthroscopically, and both are quite successful in treating this problem. After surgery, several weeks of recovery are required followed by gradual resumption of activities.

Luckily only about 5-10 percent of people with tennis elbow require surgery. Greater than 90 percent of people respond to activity modification and physical therapy. Tennis elbow is a very common problem affecting our active population. The good news is that usually it will get better with a little bit of time and rest. Your South Bend Orthopaedic surgeon can help to provide valuable advice and treatment for this painful and sometimes long-lasting condition.