



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS™

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

Medial Epicondylitis

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is medial epicondylitis?

Golfer's elbow has many medical names. This painful condition on the inside of the elbow can also be called medial elbow tendonitis/tendinosis or medial epicondylitis. By any name, golfer's elbow involves tendons located around the inside of the elbow. These tendons bend the wrist and fingers down, as well as turn the palm down. Repetitive motion can injure the tendons and they may become painful.

The area of pain with medial epicondylitis shown in red



What are the symptoms of medial epicondylitis?

Golfer's elbow symptoms include pain and aching in the elbow and/or weakness in the forearm, wrist and hand. Tenderness to touch is found just above or below the bony bump on the inside of the elbow. Patients may also experience tightness in the forearm and difficulty with daily activities.

What are the causes of medial epicondylitis?

Many patients diagnosed with golfer's elbow have never golfed! Any repeated activity with the palm down and the wrist bent or gripping can strain the tendon at the inside of the elbow. Actions that may make the problem worse include gripping, pulling or lifting. Common activities that may lead to medial epicondylitis can include pitching, golfing, carrying a heavy suitcase, playing a violin or painting. The most common age group with medial epicondylitis is between 20-50 years old, although it can occur at any age.

What is the treatment for medial epicondylitis?

Treatment from a doctor can include medications, steroid injections into the painful area and rest. A doctor can also send a patient to a qualified hand therapist. Surgery is only considered if the pain is severe, and/or symptoms have been present for six months or longer.



Activities performed with the palm down and wrist bent, such as carrying a suitcase, can strain the tendons at the inside of the elbow

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist can help by first finding the cause of the problem, and which activities make the pain worse. The therapist may educate on injury prevention and how to change painful activities. A hand therapist can fabricate a custom wrist orthosis (brace) to rest the wrist flexors. The therapist will often teach stretching and strengthening exercises, as well as use other treatments to help decrease the pain. Therapy goals are to regain motion, function and strength, and a return to pain-free daily life. If surgery cannot be avoided, hand therapy is important to regain



motion and strength, as well as return to prior level of activity after the operation.

Example of a wrist orthosis to rest the wrist flexors

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.