

# TENNIS ELBOW and Osteopathy

**Ian Whyte D.O.**  
**Kirsten Nottrot D.O.**  
**Rebecca Podmore BSc (Ost) Hons. BA**  
**Rachel Griffin BSc (Ost) Hons. Dip PGAO**

**Registered Osteopaths**  
Established 1978.



**19, Lichfield Street.**  
**Stone.**  
**Staffs.**  
**ST15 8NA**  
**Tel: 01785 816481.**

**Castlefields Surgery.**  
**Castle Way.**  
**Castlefields.**  
**Stafford.**  
**ST16 1BS**  
**Tel: 01785 248298**

[www.staffs-osteopaths.co.uk](http://www.staffs-osteopaths.co.uk)



The aim of this small leaflet is to explain to you something about the condition of tennis elbow and how osteopathy can help.

Tennis elbow, or lateral epicondylitis, to give it the proper medical name, generally has very little to do with tennis. Tennis players can get it but only about 5% of those suffering with the condition actually play tennis! It can affect anyone who happens to do a lot of gripping: e.g. using a hammer, a screw-driver, a sports racket, or doing the ironing etc. The condition gradually comes on and is felt over the outer part of the elbow and is also painful to touch. What happens is that there is a strain or tear in the tendons of the extensor muscles from where they originate on the outside of the elbow.

Try a little experiment and you will see how it works:

Clench your hand into a fist and you will find that the wrist automatically tilts backwards from the pull of the muscles up to the elbow. As you clench and unclench you can see the muscles contract and relax all the way up to where they start from at the outer part of the elbow itself. The wrist, by tilting backwards, gives greater strength to the grip of the hand.

Now when someone develops tennis elbow it is usually because the wrist has been overused in some form or another. This overuse is maybe due to returning to a sport after a long absence, or taking up a new hobby which requires a lot of use of the wrist. The above mechanism goes wrong in that the pull at the elbow becomes too great and there is a strain or tear of some of the fibres of the tendons which join the muscles onto the bone. This area gets inflamed, starts to

heal but then gets torn again when the hand is next used in a gripping movement. It can become very painful and also very weak every time you try to grip hold of anything. Even trying to lift a mug of coffee or a pint of beer or even holding a pen, can start to become difficult. The whole situation is reckoned to be a degenerative process with the inflammation stage being relatively short lived, so much so that the condition is often now referred to as being a tendinosis as opposed to a tendonitis (use of the term ITIS implies inflammation.)

A tennis elbow can be a real nuisance as it can sometimes, if not treated, give trouble for a couple of years resulting in you having to give up your favourite sport for some considerable time, or curtailing any attempts at DIY.

So what can be done about it?

Tennis elbows can be notoriously unpredictable in their response to treatment especially if a cortisone injection has been given previously which hasn't worked. However, the secret Osteopathically when giving treatment is to specifically isolate the centre of the lesion which can be in a number of different places around the elbow and to concentrate soft tissue treatment onto the muscle bellies down towards the wrist and up towards the shoulder.

This approach seems to give the best possible recovery rate and your Osteopath can also give you instructions on how to avoid any

recurrences. Such things as a non slip handle on your racket or having your golf club handles padded out, or purchasing an epicondylitis clasp to minimise the pull from the muscles themselves can all be of help.

It is important to gradually build up the loading of the elbow as the symptoms subside. This can be done with some graded rehabilitation exercises which will build up the strength and flexibility of the wrist and elbow. If you are a sports person, it is also important to make sure that you are doing your sport correctly. Racket players need to make sure that the selection of shots is appropriate and that there has been a good warm up before even picking up the racket. Keeping the arm and forearm warm in a cold sports hall can make quite a difference.

There are all sorts of other adaptations and lifestyle changes which haven't been covered here which may be appropriate in your particular set of circumstances so feel free to ring either of the practices to speak to one of the Osteopaths in attendance or in fact, if you want to ask any questions whatsoever about Osteopathy in general.

