

Tendinitis and Tennis Elbow

Tendinitis means inflammation of a tendon, the part of a muscle that attaches to bone. Tendinitis is not common in young children but can occur in older children and teens, especially athletes. “Tennis elbow” is one common type of tendinitis.

What is tendinitis?

Tendinitis is inflammation (pain and swelling) of the tendons attaching muscle to bone around a joint. Tendinitis usually results from overuse, that is, performing the same motion over and over again. Tendinitis of the elbow is sometimes called “tennis elbow,” although it can result from other activities as well.

What does it look like?

- Pain and some swelling near a joint, such as the elbow, shoulder, back of the ankle (Achilles’ tendon), back of the thigh (hamstrings), or even a finger joint.
- Weakness or difficulty moving the joint, especially when performing repetitive motions.
- In tennis elbow, the bony point on the outside of the elbow may become inflamed (epicondylitis).

What causes tendinitis?

Tendinitis is an overuse injury, most often caused by performing the same motion over and over again. Tendon damage builds up until it becomes difficult or painful to perform that particular motion. In tennis and other sports, the injury may result from incorrect technique. Many other activities may also cause tendinitis, such as:

- Golf (elbow tendinitis).
- Baseball or other throwing sports (shoulder or elbow tendinitis).
- Running (Achilles’ tendinitis).
- Basketball or other jumping sports (knee tendinitis).

What are some possible complications of tendinitis?

- Usually, tennis elbow and other forms of tendinitis clear up with simple treatments, especially rest and the use of anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen).
- Rarely, tendinitis leads to a tear of the muscle or tendon, requiring surgery.

What puts your child at risk of tendinitis?

Tendinitis most often occurs in older children and teens who play sports or participate in other rigorous activities. In tennis and other sports, tendinitis may result from incorrect technique. Tendinitis is rare in younger children.

Can tendinitis be prevented?

Learning and following correct technique—for example, the proper tennis stroke—may help to prevent tendinitis or keep it from recurring.

How is tendinitis treated?

- *Rest.* Have your child take a break from the sport or other activity that is causing pain. It is especially important to stop any repeated motions that are irritating the tendon.
- *Medications.* A few days of treatment with anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen may help to reduce pain and inflammation.
- *Rehabilitation.* Depending on the cause and location of the tendinitis, specific exercises or other rehabilitation such as splinting may be recommended.

Usually, tendinitis improves after a few weeks of rest and simple treatments. If pain and inflammation continue, other therapy may be needed. We may recommend a visit to an orthopedic surgeon (a specialist in treating bone and joint problems).

When should I call your office?

Call our office if your child’s tendinitis symptoms (pain, swelling, or tenderness) don’t improve within a few weeks or if your child’s pain or swelling becomes severe.