

While history and symptoms are informative, diagnostic imaging, such as X-rays or an MRI, may be recommended by your provider to investigate the cause of pain and the extent of injury.

Getting back on the court

Pain management is geared toward conservative, non-operative treatments, as 80% to 95% of patients have success, according to AAOS. These include:

Rest. While taking a break is typically the hardest treatment, relieving stress and overuse is the first step in recovery.

"It's most distressing to watch people play pickleball three to four times a week

with active injuries," says Sharon Ricci, founder of PickleballChicks.org in Hamilton, Ontario. "I experienced pickleball elbow, and as hard as it was to give up pickleball, I cut back to once or twice a week and was more conscious of when my arm was starting to get sore and stopped sooner."

Equipment. Properly fit equipment, such as a pickleball player's paddle, can help prevent and alleviate symptoms.

Medications. Over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen may help reduce pain and swelling. Topical agents, such as Voltaren Emulgel, can also help alleviate symptoms.

Exercises. Working with a physical or occupational therapist can be beneficial. Along with targeted exercises, therapists can provide ice massage, electrical stimulation and ultrasound.

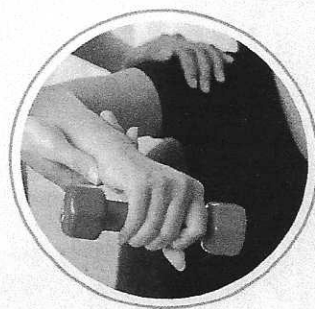
Brace. Wearing a brace or strap on the forearm can help relieve the pressure and stress on the injured tendon.

Injections. If conservative measures do not provide relief, your doctor may recommend a steroid injection for your elbow to help decrease the inflammation.

Surgery. If symptoms do not improve after six to 12 months of conservative treatment, surgery to remove the diseased tendon may be recommended.

"It's important to find a provider to look at the bigger picture, not just where the pain is," Sariban says. "If your provider doesn't look at the big picture, including movement screens and mechanic evaluations, you aren't being treated fully." ■

Jennifer Kollker is a certified nurse practitioner and medical writer in Indiana.



Prevent pain before it starts

"Prevention is the best treatment. Poor mechanics and form lead to increased stress on the tendons of the forearm when backhanding the ball, leading to increased risk of injuries, especially pickleball elbow. The best thing a pickleball player, or any athlete, can do is maintain proper form and sound mechanics.

"Players new to sports such as pickleball need to properly build strength and agility to help them achieve desired activity levels such as five to six days a week on the courts."—Noe Sariban, doctor of physical therapy and founder of Thepickleballdoctor.com

FROM LEFT: DRAZEN CRIZZYSTUDIO / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Pain reliever 411

Check with your pharmacist or health care provider to determine the best medication to help manage

your pain and inflammation. Even over-the-counter medications have side effects or may affect people with kidney problems, high blood pressure or other

health conditions. Several may interact with other medications or have increased risks if taken with alcohol.—JK

Pickleball elbow

Tips for safe and pain-free play

by JENNIFER KOLLKER



COSTCO CONNECTION

Over-the-counter pain relievers and topical treatments are available in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com. Pickleball equipment is available at Costco.com.

With its appeal to players of all ages, it's no surprise that pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in North America.

In the U.S., the Sports & Fitness Industry Association noted that pickleball grew 51.8% from 2022 to 2023 and 223.5% over the last three years.

"People of all ages are addicted to pickleball, and it has changed their lives mentally and physically," says Noe Sariban, a doctor of physical therapy and a Level II certified pickleball teaching professional. "While a lot of pickleball players aren't previous athletes, they're now out on the courts five to six times per week playing for hours."

Along with this staggering growth in pickleball players has come an increase in the associated number of injuries, such as pickleball elbow.

What is pickleball elbow?

According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), pickleball elbow is medically known as lateral

epicondylitis. Also known as tennis elbow, it is a painful condition of the elbow often caused by overuse such as that experienced during repetitive racket sports.

This overuse causes the tendons that attach muscles to bones in the forearm to develop degeneration or, in some instances, micro-tearing. This leads to pain and tenderness on the outside aspect of the elbow, where several forearm muscles originate.

Diagnosing pickleball elbow

A thorough history and description of symptoms are often the key tools needed to diagnose pickleball elbow.

Common symptoms include:

- Pain and/or burning at the outer elbow
- Pain that is worsened after repetitive activity, such as holding a racket
- Weak grip strength
- Tenderness to the bony prominence at the outer elbow
- Pain when straightening your wrist and fingers against resistance