

Eliminating Exasperating Elbow Pain: Golfers and Tennis Players Beware... **by Ryan and Joanna Sleik**

With warmer spring temperatures finally upon us (at least for a weekend or two), it's easy to get caught up with our favorite summertime activities. With all the beautiful golf courses within our grasp, it is no wonder that golf has quickly become a popular pastime and sport for both young and old. Fishing and hunting entice many to head to the bush. And with the snow almost off Mount Baker (or so the legend states) the vegetable garden is already in the ground. But as we break out of hibernation and race out to the sunshine, we forget that, especially early in the season, these activities can be very irritating to our muscles and joints, with our elbows, shoulders, knees and low back often paying the price. Over the next few months our newsletter will attempt to cover a few of these most common ailments, with the goals of keeping you healthy and active and being able to participate in the activities you love and enjoy.

Golfer's elbow, or medial epicondylitis, refers to pain and inflammation on the inside of your elbow, at a point where the tendons of your forearm muscles attach. Generally people report specific pain at the elbow but pain can also spread to the forearm, wrist and hand. Tennis elbow, or lateral epicondylitis is a similar condition but refers to symptoms on the outside of the elbow. Both of these conditions result from too much stress placed on the tendons of the forearm muscles where they attach to the elbow joint. Tendons are strong rope-like bands of tissue that connect muscles to bones. With repeated stress or overuse these tendons become inflamed and painful (also referred to as tendonitis) and small tears can occur. Over time, and with repetitive stress and chronic inflammation, scar tissue can develop weakening the tendons, explaining why that pesky elbow pain may eventually go away but often comes back with resumption of the irritating activity.

The development of golfer's and tennis elbow can often be traced to the way that we use our forearm muscles (and not very much to do with the actual sport of golf or tennis!) Ironically, the majority of clients we see with tennis elbow have never even tried the sport! Tennis elbow is often more common because we tend to over stress the muscles on the top of our forearm (extensors) that bend the wrist upwards and extend the fingers. Alternately, the muscles on the underside of our forearm are used when we make a fist, bend the wrist down and carry objects with our palm up. An imbalance of these two muscle groups can lead to more stress placed either on the outside or the inside of the elbow joint, resulting in one of the two types of epicondylitis.

Early intervention for golfer's and tennis elbow is the key. What can start out as an annoying ache in the elbow after a few rounds of golf, or gardening for the afternoon can quickly become a chronic problem. With a few helpful stretches, massage for the forearm muscles in question and techniques to break up the scar tissue and decrease inflammation including acupuncture and ultrasound, long-term relief can be achieved. Knowing the activities and actions that are contributing to the problem is also an important part of getting your elbow troubles under control. Occasionally, a tennis or golfer's elbow brace (a strap-like band placed around the upper part of the forearm) can be used to decrease pain and make these activities more bearable, but one must keep in

mind, that the brace often acts to temporarily alleviate the condition and not provide a solution to the problem at hand. Keep in mind that the injured tissues at the elbow can become very weak and may take time to slowly become strong enough to do the activities you want to do. If your elbow is sore with light activity such as opening a jar or lifting the coffee pot, you are probably not ready to participate in heavier activities without the risk of re-injury. With the proper information golfer's and tennis elbow are very manageable conditions and do not have to act as a barrier to some of the activities that you enjoy. To help eliminate your exasperating elbow pain, speak with your physiotherapist today.