



DynamicHealth



## How to help your elbow pain



Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust: delivering excellence in musculo-skeletal services and pelvic health physiotherapy across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

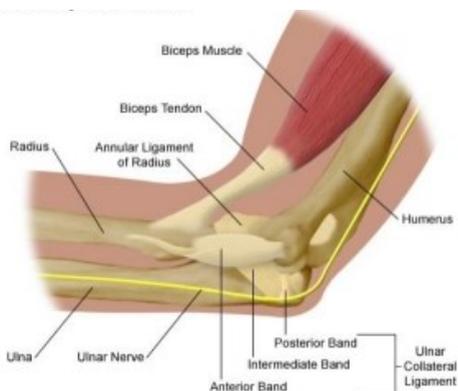
This guidance has been produced by the DynamicHealth physiotherapy service. It offers simple measures to help you manage your elbow problem safely; often the right advice and exercises are all you need to improve the problem.

**If your elbow pain started after recent trauma, please seek medical advice before reading further.**

## About the elbow

The elbow is a hinge joint, the movements that occur at the elbow are:

- Straightening/ extension (completed by the triceps),
- Bending/ flexion and rotating (completed by the biceps) .

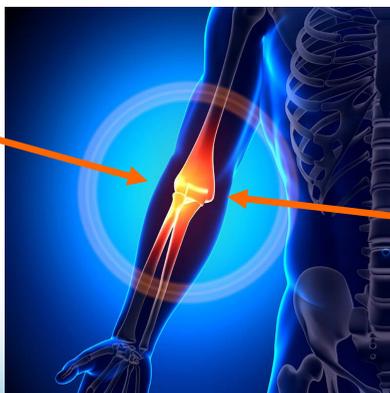


There are another 19 muscles in the forearm that attach around the elbow and insert into the wrist and hand. Due to the attachment to the elbow these can be involved in pain caused at the elbow.

## The most common causes of elbow pain

Pain either inside or outside of the elbow is usually caused by a repetitive strain tendon injury or overuse. This is most commonly known as golfers or tennis elbow (you don't have to be a tennis player/ golfer to get these). Other common causes of elbow pain can be a fracture, joint instability, arthritis, bursitis or a nerve related pain.

Pain on the outside of the elbow  
**(Tennis elbow)**



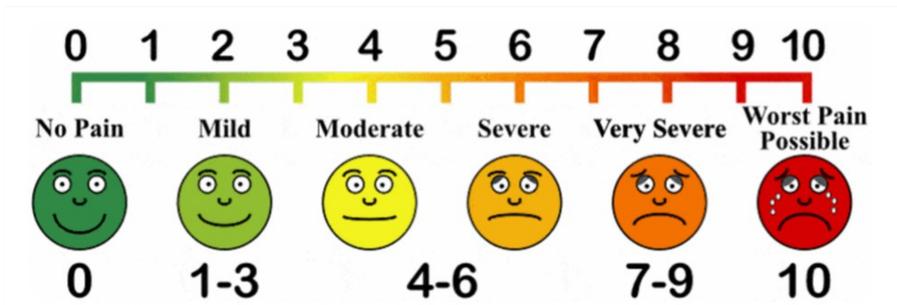
Pain on the inside of the elbow  
**(Golfers elbow)**

## How much should I do?

- **Exercise every other day** – allowing enough rest is important to let the soft tissues recover and develop.
- **Choose 3 or 4 exercises** from the set below that are challenging but manageable.
- **Perform 3–5 sets of 5 –10 repetitions** of each exercise.
- **Rest for up to 1–2 minutes** between each set.
- **Once an exercise is easy, progress it** by increasing the number of repetitions (you could aim to increase it by 2 - 5 repetitions every 2 weeks) or by holding the positions for longer, or moving to a more challenging exercise.

## How much pain is too much?

- **Before exercising, rate your pain** at that moment on a scale of 0–10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can imagine.
- **A maximum pain level of 4/10 while exercising is fine**, as long as this eases within 45 minutes of the session and does not interfere with sleep or activities the next day.
- **If your pain increases beyond this, simplify the exercise** by reducing the range of movement or number of repetitions, or try an easier exercise.



## Range of movement and stretching exercises

If your elbow has lost movement because of pain or stiffness, it needs to be regained. In order to strengthen the elbow effectively, complete these exercises little by little and often.

**Stretching exercises can be completed 2 or 3 times every day**



To create a stretch you can use your opposite arm to gently push into the end range.

Or use the position as shown on the left



Start of with active movements of the elbow. Flexion and extension in a comfortable position as an exercise or your warm up.

## Strengthening exercises

Find something to use as a weight if you do not have a dumbbell, i.e. a water bottle, a can, or a bag. The weight needs to be manageable where you find the exercise challenging but not so much that it increases your pain. This may be different for everyone.

## Golfers elbow



Start with your hand over the edge of a table with your palm facing up.

Slowly lift the weight upwards, using your other hand to assist this movement as shown.

Then with the affected hand, slowly lower the weight back down as far as you can tolerate.



Start with your affected side hand over the edge of a table with your thumb facing up.

Grip the bottom end of a weighted object in the affected side

Slowly lower the weight outwards so the palm faces up. Then using your other hand assist the weight back to the start position.

## Tennis elbow



Support your forearm on a table with your palm facing down. Hold a weight.

Bend your wrist up assisting the movement with your other hand. Slowly lower your hand down without assistance from the other hand.



Start by standing, with your arms by your sides and elbows at a right angle. Hold a Flexbar with both hands, or alternatively something like a tea towel would work really well.

Straighten your wrists and twist the Flexbar/tea towel outwards with both hands. Return to the starting position.

Note. The resistance increases when you bring your hands closer together.

## Try adding the next exercise to either rehab exercise plan



### Biceps Curl

Stand tall with arms by your side, holding a weight with one hand. Palm facing inwards.

Bend your elbow and bring your palm towards your shoulder. Straighten your arm back to the starting position in a controlled manner.

## Top tips

### Elbow band

Some people find a Golfers/Tennis elbow band helpful in reducing symptoms during the day ( see picture).

These can be purchased online or some pharmacists will stock these.

You should place these approx. 1 inch below the elbow skin crease and if it has a padded/thicker section this should be placed on the painful side of the elbow.

They should only be worn short periods whilst doing the activities you find difficult.

### Flare up management

It is not unusual to have a few flare ups along the way during your recovery. If this happens don't panic as it's very unlikely you will have done any lasting damage.

You may need to scale back the exercises a bit and then gradually build up again. It may be that you overdid an activity so reflecting on what might have flared it up and trying to find a way to avoid or modify that particular activity until things settle more would be a good idea.



### Managing your pain

Pain relief is not simply there to mask a pain; one of its main uses in physiotherapy is to encourage more normal movement and activity, which will help sensitive structures to settle down and strengthen.

Please visit the links below regarding pain relief:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-nhs-help-for-your-pain/>

Pain relief can take time to take effect so please be patient if you're not getting instant relief.

It is always advisable if you are unsure or you are thinking about taking a new medication to speak to your pharmacist or GP first.

## **When to seek further support/ advise**

If your symptoms have not resolved in 6 -12 weeks, in spite of regular exercises, modifying your activities and trialling a support and pain management, then please speak to your GP or if you haven't already you can self refer to physiotherapy: <https://www.eoemskservice.nhs.uk/physiotherapy-self-referral>

If your symptoms are worsening, or if you are noticing changes to the appearance of your elbow then we suggest you get in touch with your GP.

## **Lifestyle and Wellbeing Support Services**

<https://haycambspboro.co.uk/>

<https://healthyyou.org.uk/>

Speaking to the social prescriber at your GP practice can also be a very useful resource.

## For further information about this service contact:

**General Enquiries:** 0300 555 0123

Physiotherapy Dept, Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, Hinchingsbrooke Park, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 6NT

Physiotherapy Dept, Brookfields Campus, 351 Mill Road, Cambridge, CB1 3DF

Physiotherapy Dept, Princess of Wales Hospital, Lynn Road, Ely, Cambs, CB6 1DN

Physiotherapy Dept, Doddington Hospital, Benwick Road, Doddington, Cambs, PE15 0UG

Physiotherapy Dept, Rowan Lodge, North Cambs Hospital, The Park, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 3AB

Physiotherapy Dept, City Care Centre, Thorpe Road, Peterborough, PE3 6DB

### Find us online:

[www.eoemskservice.nhs.uk/health-and-wellbeing/advice-and-exercises](http://www.eoemskservice.nhs.uk/health-and-wellbeing/advice-and-exercises)

[facebook.com/DynamicHealthMSK](https://facebook.com/DynamicHealthMSK)

[twitter.com/CCSMSK](https://twitter.com/CCSMSK)

If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

To find out how we use what we know about you (Privacy Notice) or how to access our buildings (AccessAble), please visit [www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk](http://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk) and follow the links or please contact us.



If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: [ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net).

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.