

EXERCISES FOR LATERAL EPICONDYLALGIA (TENNIS ELBOW) PRACTITIONER NOTES

This exercise prescription can be provided in stages:

First, ask the patient to avoid activities that aggravate their condition* but continue to perform other activities – otherwise the load capacity of the tendon will be reduced and this could affect later rehabilitation and increase the risk of recurrence.¹⁰ This is because tensile load is vital for the strength and integrity of the tendon but there is also a range of ideal strain (i.e. not too little, not too much) that provides the appropriate mechanical stimulation for anabolism (metabolic processes that build biomolecules).¹¹

*i.e. tennis, gardening, gripping

- *“If it hurts to pick things up with the palm facing down don’t do it, carry things with your palm up”*
- *“Carry things close to your body”*

Step 1 – Prescribe simple exercises that reduce pain, increase or maintain flexibility, and retrain motor patterns.

Choose the most appropriate exercises from the following:

- Resisted wrist elevation 1 or 2 (to reduce pain)
- Sideways elbow glide or elbow point glide (to reduce pain)
- Stretches (improve or maintain flexibility)
- Palm slide (sensorimotor retraining)

Step 2 – When sufficient pain relief has occurred the patient can move on to more challenging isometric exercises.

- Resisted wrist elevation 2 or resisted wrist elevation (elastic band)
- Continue sideways elbow glide or elbow point glide if they provide pain relief
- Continue stretching if flexibility remains a concern

Step 3 – Once the patient is able to perform resisted isometric exercises pain-free they can move on to a selection of exercises that further load the tendon.

- Upwards wrist curls (palm down)
- Eccentric wrist curls (palm down)
- Eccentric wrist curls elastic band (palm down)
- Tic toc exercise
- Rubber bar twist (Theraband® Flexbar®)

In addition to forearm exercises the presence of proximal limb weakness should also be addressed (see evidence biceps flexion). This can occur at anytime during the exercise prescription. Factors to consider when determining when to prescribe include:

- The patient’s willingness to perform exercises
- The patient’s capacity to recall exercises – too many exercises at once may overwhelm some patients
- The level of contribution of the proximal limb to the problem – if you believe the proximal limb is a major contributor you may prescribe these exercises alone initially to see if they resolve the problem