

Dr. Paul Callaway's Golf Health and Fitness Tips

“How to Manage and Prevent Golfer’s Elbow”

After low back pain and shoulder pain, the third most common injury experienced by amateur and pro golfers alike is to the elbow ... often referred to as “golfer’s elbow”. Technically speaking, *most* elbow pain results from inflamed tendons (*tendonitis*). Tendon inflammation can occur to the inside and/or outside portions of the elbow. Right hand golfers often begin to experience pain on the inside of the right elbow and/or on the outside of the left elbow. Tendonitis in either elbow can be very painful and may prevent a golfer from playing until the problem is properly treated and completely resolved.

Golfer’s elbow is most often a chronic, “overuse injury” from a combination of poor golf swing mechanics, poor body posture, flexibility and/or strength coupled with hitting a lot of balls. This problem can also more acutely result from not warming up properly before practicing or playing, hitting “fat” shots, hitting off mats or hard turf (especially with harder cover range balls) or even from a recent change in equipment from flexible to stiffer shafts.

If you ever begin to experience early signs of elbow discomfort, you should contact your doctor *immediately* to have your symptoms properly diagnosed so treatment can begin as soon as possible. Treatment options range from oral anti-inflammatory medication, icing, physical therapy, various functional support braces, rest and, more recently, magnetic and far-infrared technology. Some worse cases require cortisone injections or even surgical intervention.

The typical time period for most elbow tendonitis to completely resolve when diagnosed quickly and treated properly can range from between 2-6 weeks. If golfers wait too long before seeking professional medical help, however, the problem can become much worse, more difficult to treat and may take up to 4-6 months, or longer, to completely resolve.

To minimize the risk of ever experiencing golfer's elbow, here are a few simple exercises you can try to get your wrists and forearms in the best possible shape for golf. The first two exercises are stretching exercises and should be done before and after practicing, playing and before and after the following strengthening exercises.

The stretching exercises should be held for **20-30 seconds each and repeated 3-5 times** for each technique. The two strengthening exercises should be done every other day for between **1-2 sets of 10 repetitions**.

Wrist and Forearm Stretch

Sit or stand holding a club in front of your chest with both hands shoulder width apart and palms facing down (see picture #1). Keeping your elbows straight and fingers closed, bend your wrists down until you feel a comfortable stretch in the outside (lateral) portion of your forearm near the elbow (see picture #2). Then, repeat the same stretch holding the club with your palms facing up to stretch the inside (medial) portion of your forearm.



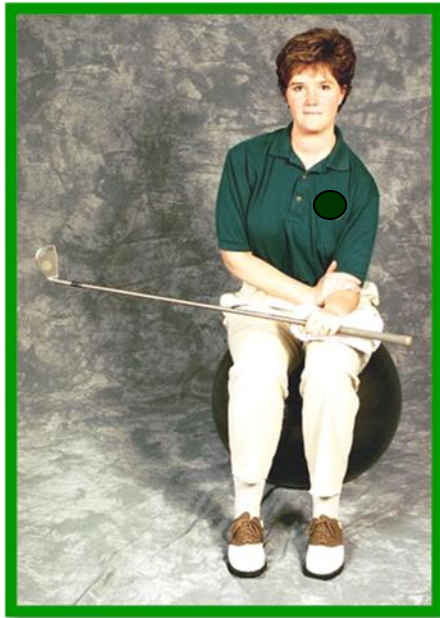
Picture #1: Palms down



Picture #2: Palms up

Wrist and Forearm Rotations

Sit or stand holding a club (start with a putter and gradually advance to a driver) with your normal "grip" on the club and the clubhead rotated to your right until it has reached the *three o'clock position* (see picture #3). Keeping your elbows bent to approximately 90°, slowly and under control, rotate the club to your left until the clubhead is now in the *nine o'clock position* (see picture #4).



Picture #3



Picture #4

Wrist and Forearm Waggles

Sit or stand holding a club (start with a putter and gradually advance to a driver) in one hand. Keeping your elbow straight, begin the “waggle” strengthening exercise with your wrist uncocked so the head of the club is tipped down as far as your wrist will allow (see picture #5). Slowly and under control, raise the clubhead as far as possible by cocking your wrist (see picture #6). Hold this position for 2-3 seconds and then slowly lower the clubhead to the starting position.



Picture # 5



Picture #6

Paul Callaway, PT, PhD is the Director of Golf Fitness at the Cantigny Golf Academy in Wheaton, IL. He was the first Director of Physical Therapy on the PGA Tour and has specialized in golf-specific fitness training, performance enhancement and injury-prevention for the past 25 years. If you have questions for him about this article or any other topic related to golf fitness and performance, he can be reached via email at paul@callawaygolffitness.com, by calling 630-567-7572 or by visiting www.callawaygolffitness.com.