Don’t Let Tennis Injuries Sideline You

Tennis is one of the world's most popular sports and also one of the most physically demanding athletic activities on the joints and tendons, which can lead to overuse injuries. Whether you're a novice or an experienced player, you can lower your chances of developing common tennis injuries by:

- practicing proper form and technique,
- using the right equipment
- allowing your body to rest and recover
- consulting a sports medicine specialist before you get hurt

Tennis Elbow

Repetitive use and overuse can cause the inflammation of the tendons that connect your forearm muscles to the outside of your elbow. If you've been playing tennis, notice your grip feels weaker, and there's pain or burning on the outside of your elbow, you may have developed Tennis Elbow.

Biceps Tendonitis/Tendinitis

The cord-like structure that connects your bicep muscle to your shoulder is the biceps tendon. This tendon can become irritated or inflamed due to repetitive overhead swings. If you develop biceps tendonitis, you could experience weakness, pain, or tenderness in the front of your shoulder that feels worse with overhead activity. You may also experience pain or achiness that moves down the upper arm, or a snapping sound in your shoulder.
**Rotator Cuff Tears**

Rotator cuff muscles and tendons come together to provide motion and stability to your shoulder. Overuse of your shoulder can lead to rotator cuff inflammation or tears. This type of injury can develop over months or years of tennis practice or can happen suddenly. Rotator cuff injuries can trigger shoulder pain, loss of range of motion, and weakness.

**Knee Pain**

Pain at the front of your knee can be a sign of several different or related injuries caused by the impact of repetitive motions, especially on hard court surfaces. Tennis-related knee injuries can cause tenderness, achiness, and stiffness. Acute injuries can occur in the form of meniscus tears and ligament injuries.

**How can I prevent tennis injuries?**

If you're an experienced tennis player, you naturally don't want to stop competing due to an acute or chronic injury. And if you're new to the sport, you want to stay healthy.

"I recommend that enthusiastic new tennis players ease into this physically demanding sport over time to help prevent acute injuries on the court," says Dr. Lee Kaplan, chief of the University of Miami's Sports Medicine Institute.

New players should seek out tennis lessons or clinics, even if they think they know the basics. Practicing proper form and technique is essential for injury prevention in any sport - from warm-up and practice to competitive matches. “Something as simple as establishing the correct grip can help you avoid elbow and wrist pain,” says Dr. Kaplan, who serves as medical director for the Miami Hurricanes and the Miami Marlins.
“Even in tennis, your body's power comes from the core. So, strengthening your core and hips to withstand the force you're going to put on your body is important for injury prevention,” says Dr. Stephen Henry, an orthopedic sports medicine specialist with UHealth.

**Proactive not reactive care**

“People tend to see me only after they get hurt. But, if you consult with an expert at the beginning of your training — whether you want to play sports casually or competitively — we can do a head-to-toe assessment,” says Dr. Henry. Preventive sports medicine looks at the whole patient. As Dr. Henry says, “I'll review your general medical issues, including ones that seem unrelated to athletics.

Do you have diabetes, electrolyte abnormalities, a muscular imbalance, or high blood pressure? We will conduct a sports participation physical exam to ensure you can handle rigorous exercise. This may include blood tests and an assessment of your exercise capacity with cardiovascular stress testing if needed. Furthermore, we can review your strength, posture, and pelvic mechanics to maximize injury prevention. Ultimately, our goal is to design a personalized home exercise program so you can avoid injuries and other serious health complications.”

Instead of waiting to come in with a sports injury, a preventative medicine consultation with an expert from the Sports Medicine Institute can identify and address your unique health risks, physical challenges, and abilities before you have a chance to get hurt.

“We can use the full resources of the university's clinical, surgical, and research experts to help you reach your health, wellness, and fitness goals. If you need to see
other medical specialists, like a cardiologist or an ophthalmologist, or if you need to lose weight, have nutritional issues or diabetes, I can be your point person, "says Dr. Henry.

The right equipment

To prevent tennis-related injuries, consult an expert. Do your research before renting or purchasing sports equipment to ensure it's the right fit for you or your child. The perfect racquet or athletic shoes for a tennis pro are not necessarily the right gear for young players or adults starting the sport.

Rest and recovery

"Most important is your willingness to rest to allow the body to recover from overuse injuries," said Dr. Kaplan. "It is the casual tennis players who end up in my office in pain from an injury," says Dr. Henry. "The pros tend to know what precautions to take and when to back off and recover."

Ensure you're getting enough recovery time. Listen to your body. If you're going to try a physically demanding activity, don't start playing for an entire day or weekend. Practice or play for 10 to 30 minutes per day, depending on your level of fitness.

Dr. Henry says, “after an intense workout or an afternoon of practicing, give your muscles at least 48 hours to recover and prevent delayed onset muscle soreness. When you exercise and play, you're tearing muscle fibers, so you have to give them enough time to rebuild.”

Also, athletes in South Florida are lucky enough to play tennis year-round. But this means local tennis players must stay hydrated and take frequent breaks to avoid dangerous heat stroke.
Diagnosis and Treatment

If you experience pain, weakness, joint clicking, or loss of motion during or following tennis practice or competition, consult with a doctor who specializes in sports medicine. It's better to treat tennis-related injuries sooner than later. Early treatment will help prevent acute inflammation from developing into a chronic condition that limits your activity. A full exam, medical history, and advanced imaging can help your doctor determine which treatment(s) will be most effective with the lowest risk for complications.

"First, I would recommend physical therapy or oral anti-inflammatories or Tylenol, along with a personalized home exercise program," says Dr. Henry. “In some cases, a targeted injection of a corticosteroid is the right approach. But, with an injury like tennis elbow, a steroid injection could weaken the tendon and cause a rupture.”

Depending on the injury and your response to treatment, options may include regenerative medicine treatments like stem cell therapy and platelet-rich plasma (PRP). These types of therapies can encourage successful healing rates for tennis-related injuries, including rotator cuff partial tears, biceps tendonitis, tennis elbow, and elbow ligament sprains and partial tears.

"Everyone's situation is different, so it's important to speak with a specialist," Dr. Henry says. “When folks are enjoying a sport, they're not thinking about their overall, long-term health and risks. But we are.”

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