Treatment of Medial and Lateral Elbow Pain

Medial and Lateral epicondylitis is a very common complaint for individuals who work a lot with his/her wrists. The resolution of pain involves gradually increasing the number of repetitions or resistance of the exercises performed. However, it is important to stay within a zone that allows the body to adapt to the new stresses and not increase your present level of pain. To help with that, please use the following guideline.

Pain is generally rated on a scale of 0 (no pain/normal) to 10 (worst pain). Any exercise performed should never create more than a pain level of 1-4. At no point should exercise cause a steady rise in pain. Any increase in pain should be temporary and should be relieved with rest or modalities mentioned below. After a few sessions, you should notice an overall decrease in your pain. It is also important to make note of your function. You may first note that you are more active before the onset of your usual pain.

Should you have an increase in your pain:
1. Stay at the same number of repetitions and resistance until your soreness decreases
2. Decrease the number of repetitions, staying at the same intensity, progressing more slowly the number of repetitions
3. Decrease both intensity and repetitions, progressing more slowly the number of repetitions

Guidelines for Using Ice (cold) or Heat

**Cold:**
- Either bagged frozen vegetables (peas and corn form best) or bag of ice about one inch thick with a small amount of water in the bottom. Get as much air out of the bag as possible. In the winter you can also use snow. Apply for 20 minutes, leaving at least one hour between applications. You can secure the ice with a compression wrap if desired.
- Ice massage- by making a small block of ice in a paper cup or mold and rubbing the affected area 5-10 minutes until the skin turns red. May use this technique once an hour.

**Heat:**
Generally, several layers of damp cloth are placed between the skin and the heat source. It is left in place for no more than 30 minutes with two hours between applications. Do not secure heat in place with a compression wrap or weight.
Stretching: Lateral Epicondylitis (elbow Pain)
There are two parts of the tendon that need to be stretched. For the first part, place the elbow in approximately 30 degrees of flexion, palm turned face down. Take the opposite hand, grasp the knuckles of the hand to be stretched as shown in picture and pull down and rotate the hand to the outside. The second position is shown in picture. Perform 3-45 second stretches in each position with a 30 second rest between each stretch.

Stretching: Medial Epicondylitis (elbow Pain)
As shown in picture extend the elbow, palm facing up. Take the opposite hand, grasp the fingers of the hand to be stretched, pull them downward and rotate the hand to the outside. Perform 3-45 second stretches in each position with a 30 second rest between each stretch.
**Ice massage**

To help manage the pain associated with this injury, you can perform an ice massage. Fill a small cup with water to make a block of ice. Picture 1 indicates where to ice massage for lateral elbow pain, Picture 2 for medial elbow pain. The tendons run parallel to the arm. Rub the ice in line with the tendons until the area turns red (5-10 minutes). This can be done several times a day with at least one hour between icings.

There are several strengthening exercises utilized for each condition. The first exercises provided are specific to medial or lateral elbow pain. The later exercises are compliments to the first two.

**Strengthening: Medial Epicondylitis (?Elbow Pain)**

For this exercise, an **Eccentric** (lowering) only strengthening program will be used. Using a resistance band of some type, make a loop at one end and place it over the hand. Secure the other end under your foot. Rest the forearm on your leg or other firm surface. Keep the fingers relaxed. Use the opposite hand to raise the hand being exercised into a fully flexed position (picture 1). Lower the hand down on a 5 count into the position shown in Picture 2. Perform 3 sets of 10 reps, rest 60 seconds between each set.
Strengthening: Lateral Epicondylitis (?Elbow Pain)
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General Strengthening exercises:

Pronation and Supination (wrist over and back)
You will need a regular hammer for the next two exercises. Start the exercise with the head of the hammer pointing up (picture……). Lower the hammer on a five count to either position one (medial elbow pain) or position two (lateral elbow pain). To return to the start position, remove the hammer from the hand being exercised, and return the hand being exercised to the start position. Perform three sets ten reps, 60 seconds rest between sets.
Pain in the elbow occasionally leads to loss of motion and strength in the shoulder. The following exercises will help restore any lost motion and strength in that joint.

**Internal Rotation** - Perform 2-60 second stretches with a 15 second rest between each. You will need a rope or belt to make a loop, which the hand goes through. Monitor your torso posture by standing in front of a mirror. Make sure your shoulders stay level, your torso does not twist and your upper arm stays parallel to the body. Place the hand to be stretched in the position shown in Picture 1. It is normal to feel a pull around the shoulder joint and possibly down into the upper arm. If pain prevents you from getting your hand into the position shown, simply let the arm hang at your side and turn your palm so it faces backward. Throw the strap over your shoulder and grasp it with the hand in the position that it is in. You want to feel a moderate pulling sensation (1-2 on the pain scale) in the shoulder when performing this stretch. Ultimately, you want to be able to elevate your hand up your back (Picture 2) equal to the opposite side.

[Picture 1]  [Picture 2]

**IR/ER in scapular plane** –Start with 10 reps of the exercise, add 2-5 reps per day as pain allows, with the goal being 40 reps in a row in each position. You will need a resistance band of some type. Due to pain/weakness, you may also initially need to start with the elbow at your side. If that is the case, position your elbow one hand space from your body and slightly forward of center. No matter the start position, the elbow must stay stationary to counter the tendency to flex the elbow and pull it toward the body as the forearm and hand rotates about it (Picture 2). The motion for each exercise is the same.

Image 12:00 is straight out in front of you. When your right shoulder is being exercised, elevate the arm toward 2:30; the left 9:30. Grasp the resistance band and rotate the hand in the direction shown. Internal Rotation

Start  

[Start Image]  

Finish  

[Finish Image]
External Rotation

Start       Finish

Scaption
From a standing position, place the hands over the front pockets. Imagine the twelve o’clock reference point is in front of you. Make a fist with your right thumb pointing toward two-thirty and your left thumb pointing toward nine-thirty. Elevate the hands toward these locations. Do not shrug the shoulder. Keep the point of the elbow facing backward (if the arm runs 12:00 to 6:00, the back of the elbow points toward 3:00). The hands should be visible out of the corner of the eyes at the top of the movement. It is not unusual to feel a pulling sensation through the upper part of the shoulder when performing this exercise; this is the tendon being strengthened.