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For Immediate Release

Tennis Anyone?

Some people are just built to develop tennis elbow, study finds

ROSEMONT, IL-Tennis elbow may be unavoidable for some people, according to a study published in the September 2007 issue of [*The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*](#). However, greater understanding how this type of injury occurs may be vital to treating it in the future.

Tennis elbow is a degenerative condition of the tendons that are responsible for anchoring the muscles which extend or lift the wrist and hand. Patients, who experience tennis elbow, often complain of a severe burning pain on the outside part of the elbow. In most cases, the pain starts mildly and gradually worsens over weeks or months.

The condition occurs mainly in people age 30 to 50, although it can occur at any age. It affects as many as half of athletes who play racquet sports, including tennis, racquetball, and squash. However, it can also develop as a result of other activities that require people to use their arms in repetitive back-and-forth motions, such as fencing, painting, or raking.

This study, in which researchers examined the anatomy of 85 elbows, found that in some individuals, the tendons are attached in a place that causes them to rub against the bone during tennis or similar activities, resulting in tennis elbow (also known as lateral epicondylitis).

“The placement of the tendon simply makes some elbows more susceptible to the tennis elbow,” says Robert E. Bunata, MD, a fellow of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, practicing in Fort Worth, Texas, and primary author of the study. “It’s just how some people are built, so there may not be much they can do to prevent tennis elbow, other than avoiding activities that could cause the condition. However, this study may be a step toward identifying the best treatment options.”

The researchers found a wide range of variation in the size and shape of the bone and of the muscle and tendon attachments. But there was evidence that in a certain group of elbows, rubbing of tendon on bone was unavoidable; those are the patients who might be most susceptible to developing tennis elbow. The doctors hope that further studies will help clarify which elbows are at the greatest risk.

Nonsurgical treatments for tennis elbow are usually attempted first; these may include:

- Ice
- Braces or splints

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- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Corticosteroid injections
- Stretching exercises.

While these treatments usually work for about 85 percent of patients, others may require surgery.

“Understanding the cause of tennis elbow may help us determine more quickly who will need surgery and who can be treated nonsurgically,” Dr. Bunata says. “For those who do need surgery, we may be able to design better operations to help obtain better results.”

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