Physical Exam for Tennis Elbow

Exam Overview

During the physical exam for tennis elbow, your doctor may examine both of your arms, as well as your:

- Elbow and the muscles, tendons, nerves, and blood vessels in your arm and wrist, to check for tendon and nerve or vascular problems, including pain, weakness, or tingling.
- Neck. (Pain in your elbow may be referred from the nerves in your neck.)

If it is clear that there are no broken bones, your doctor will move your arm around to check for range of motion, flexibility, and strength.

Why It Is Done

A physical exam of the elbow is done when the elbow is sore and painful.

Results

Normal

Results from the physical exam don't show any serious problem in the elbow. Your doctor may suggest resting your arm and applying ice at home. He or she may also suggest further tests.

Abnormal

Abnormal results from the physical exam may include:
- Pain in the elbow, either at rest or while moving through a normal range of motion.
- Pain in the elbow when pressure is applied while extending the wrist (in the "stop traffic" position) and holding against resistance, or when pressure is applied while twisting the forearm.
- Tenderness to the touch (palpation).
- Inability to move the arm through a normal range of motion.
- Grinding sensation when the elbow is moving.
- Muscle weakness in the arm, wrist, or hand.
- Tingling when a nerve area is tapped (Tinel's sign) or difficulty pinching with fingers (possible nerve damage).
- Altered or decreased sensation in the arm, wrist, or hand.

**What To Think About**

Tennis elbow can usually be diagnosed with a medical history and a physical exam. Your doctor may recommend treatment without doing X-rays, to see whether the problem gets better. If it does, no more tests are needed.

**Complete the medical test information form (PDF) to help you prepare for this test.**

**Credits for Physical Exam for Tennis Elbow**

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.

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