

PHYSICAL THERAPY PROTOCOL

Lateral Epicondylitis — Conservative Management

Non-operative treatment of “tennis elbow”

Lateral epicondylitis is a degenerative tendinopathy of the common extensor origin (ECRB). Non-operative care emphasizes activity modification, load management, and progressive eccentric strengthening, which is the most effective rehabilitation component. Recovery is often measured in months.

General Precautions

- Modify aggravating activities — avoid repetitive gripping and lifting with the palm down.
- A counterforce brace or wrist splint may reduce load on the tendon.
- Some discomfort with loading exercises is acceptable; sharp pain is not.

Phase I — Pain Control Weeks 0-2

Goals

- Reduce pain and inflammation
- Protect the tendon from overload

Precautions / Restrictions

- Avoid repetitive wrist extension and forceful gripping
- Lift with palm up

Exercises & Interventions

- Relative rest / activity modification
- Counterforce brace
- Ice / cryotherapy after activity
- Gentle pain-free wrist and forearm range of motion
- Ergonomic review (tools, grip size, technique)

Criteria to Advance

- Resting pain reduced
- Able to perform gentle motion without sharp pain

Phase II — Mobility & Isometrics Weeks 2-6

Goals

- Restore flexibility
- Introduce loading

Exercises & Interventions

- Wrist extensor and flexor stretching
- Isometric wrist extension holds
- Begin eccentric wrist extensor strengthening (e.g., Tyler twist with a resistance bar)
- Soft-tissue / manual therapy as needed

Criteria to Advance

- Tolerating isometrics without flare

- Improving grip comfort

Phase III — Progressive Strengthening Weeks 6-12

Goals

- Restore strength and load tolerance

Exercises & Interventions

- Progressive eccentric and concentric wrist extensor strengthening
- Grip strengthening
- Forearm and shoulder-girdle conditioning
- Gradual reintroduction of aggravating tasks

Criteria to Advance

- Grip strength improving toward symmetric
- Minimal pain with daily tasks

Phase IV — Return to Activity Months 3+

Goals

- Return to full sport/work
- Prevent recurrence

Exercises & Interventions

- Sport-/job-specific loading progression
- Maintenance strengthening and stretching
- Technique/equipment optimization

Criteria to Advance

- Full painless function
- Symmetric grip strength

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression is criteria-based and may be advanced or slowed by Dr. O'Donnell based on intraoperative findings, tissue quality, fixation, and individual healing. Time frames are approximate. Direct questions to the office at (305) 393-8810.