

Tennis Elbow's New Friend

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Tennis elbow or lateral epicondylitis is a common problem, and not just with athletes. This condition results in pain centered around the outside of the elbow that frequently radiates toward the wrist. It is the result of an inability of the connective tissue in that part of the elbow to repair itself after repeated stress from firmly grasping objects. It affects tennis players, carpenters, gardeners and almost anyone who must repeatedly use tools or athletic equipment. The prevailing theory about the body's inability to repair the damage to the lateral side of the elbow centers around poor blood supply to the tendinous attachment connecting forearm muscles to the bone of the elbow.

Traditional treatments have employed stretching, physical therapy, ice, rest or activity modifications, as well as arthritis medicines (non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medications). When these methods proved ineffective, injection of steroid

(cortisone) into the painful area was tried with good effect. Further research determined that the act of injection and not the steroid medicine resulted in the healing process. This is believed to be the result of new vascularity caused by the needle: the healing process formed new fibrous tissue to replace the tissue damaged by repeated stress.

When injection alone was unable to create satisfactory healing, treatment turned to surgical intervention. The traditional surgery involves peeling the fibrous tendon off the bone and removing the hard outer bone at the tendon attachment. When the tendon is re-attached to bone there is usually enough healing to resolve the problem.

Recently, science has demonstrated that the use of a Radiofrequency device promotes formation of healthy fibrous tissue. This observation suggested that a Radiofrequency device could also prove helpful in treating lateral epicondylitis or tennis elbow. A new, minimally-invasive treatment using the "Topaz" Radiofrequency device has shown great promise for this condition. It can be accomplished with a fraction of the incision and pain of traditional surgical methods. A small incision permits multiple

punctures of the problem tendon with the Radiofrequency probe, and this has been successful in resolving the symptoms of lateral epicondylitis. The new procedure is performed as outpatient surgery and permits rapid recovery and an earlier return to activity. The technique holds great promise for this and other disorders of tendons as they approach bone connection.



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Dr. Scully, is a board certified orthopedic surgeon at Atlantic Orthopedics, PA. He received his medical degree from the University of Virginia School of Medicine in Charlottesville, VA, where he also performed residencies. Dr. Scully is fellowship trained in arthroscopic surgery and has a special interest in knee, shoulder injuries and sports medicine. To make an appointment with Dr. Scully or any of the other board certified Atlantic Orthopedics physicians, call 910-763-2361.