

Tennis Elbow: Strengthening Program

A printable progressive strengthening program for tennis elbow - isometrics first, then light resistance, grip work and a return to activity.

At a Glance

- Tendons respond to graded loading, not rest alone
- Start with isometrics (muscle works, joint doesn't move), then add light resistance
- Expect improvement over weeks to months - tendons are slow
- Keep the provoking activity (racket, tools, grip) lighter while you strengthen

The Program

Stage 1 - Settle symptoms and begin loading:

1. Wrist-extension isometric: push the back of the hand against a wall or table - hold 10 seconds, repeat 5 times, 2-3 times a day.
2. Grip a soft ball or rolled towel at light effort - hold 10 seconds, repeat 5 times.

Move on when the isometrics feel controlled and do not leave the elbow meaningfully worse the next day.

Stage 2 - Build strength with light resistance:

1. Wrist curls with a light weight (0.5-1 kg), palm down: 2 sets of 10-15, 2-3 times a week.
2. Gentle tennis elbow stretch after exercise: 20-30 seconds, 2-3 times.

Progress when you can complete the exercise with steady form and a manageable symptom response during the following 24 hours.

Stage 3 - Return to demanding activity:

1. Progress resistance slowly - one variable at a time.
2. Return to racket or tool use with lighter loads and more rest.
3. Continue strengthening even when pain settles.

Do This

- Load within mild discomfort that settles by the next day
- Warm up with a few gentle repetitions before activity
- Check grip size and tool ergonomics - smaller grips and lighter tools help

Avoid This

- Aggressive stretching of an irritable tendon
- Jumping straight back to full racket or tool use
- Ignoring sharp pain that worsens with every repetition
- Relying on rest or injections alone

When to See Someone

Arrange an assessment if pain is not starting to improve after several weeks of consistent loading, if grip strength drops, or if the elbow locks, swells or becomes unstable.

References

1. AAOS OrthoInfo. "Therapeutic Exercise Program for Epicondylitis."
<https://www.orthoinfo.org/recovery/epicondylitis-therapeutic-exercise-program/>
2. Lucado AM, et al. "Lateral Elbow Pain and Muscle Function Impairments: Clinical Practice Guidelines." Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy. 2022. <https://www.jospt.org/doi/10.2519/jospt.2022.0302>

***This information is for education only and is not a medical diagnosis.** InjuryAtlas does not replace an assessment by a qualified health professional. If you have severe pain, visible deformity, numbness, loss of function, or symptoms that are getting worse, seek medical care promptly.*