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Page: 4B

Ask the Expert featuring Dr. Gordon I. Groh, guest columnist

## **Prevention of tennis elbow involves equipment and conditioning**

*Question:* My spring tennis league is about to start, and last year I was continually bothered by tennis elbow. What can I do to prevent or treat tennis elbow?

*Answer:* Tennis elbow, medically known as lateral epicondylitis, is extremely common, as 90 percent of tennis players at some point in their play will experience this problem.

Prevention of tennis elbow starts with the basics of technique and equipment. Equipment may play an important role in imparting forces and alter this overuse syndrome.

Stringing materials for rackets, as well as proper string tension, are instrumental in force load control. Proper grip sizing of the racket assures appropriate leverage for shot control. Weight and dimensions of the racket should match the strength of the individual.

Good technique in hitting shots in the middle of the racket (the "sweet spot") further limits the amount of torque transmitted to the elbow.

Prevention as well as treatment can include an exercise program specifically designed to increase both flexibility and strength of the elbow and forearm muscles. You can find a link to these exercises at my Web site.

At the same time, it makes sense to engage in an overall conditioning program. If you have been out of the racket sport for a considerable length of time, a sensible program to reinstate play is recommended. We devised a program to take players through the variety of shots and executions required in tennis available at [www.drgordongroh.com](http://www.drgordongroh.com).

In spite of good preventive measures, some players may still develop tennis elbow. When these players seek medical care, we typically take them off the court to stop the overuse.

The great news is that 90 percent of patients with tennis elbow respond to nonoperative management. The regimen typically includes bracing, anti-inflammatory medication, specific exercise and limited use of steroid injections. Once symptoms are under control, we then begin the progression to get players back on the court. Careful attention to technique, equipment and training techniques are essential to decreasing the chances of a recurrence.

Few players ever require surgical management for tennis elbow, given a proper trial of medical management. Even for those who do, surgical management typically results in about 90 percent of those individuals also being able to return to their pre-injury level.

I wish you success with your upcoming season.

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**WEB EXTRA**

For a video on preventing tennis-related injuries, visit [CITIZEN-TIMES.com/livingwell](http://CITIZEN-TIMES.com/livingwell).