



Tennis (Elbow) Anyone?

Everyone has New Year's Resolutions. Eat less, exercise more. So you dust off the old tennis racquet and start playing again. It feels great to get back in the game and it's surprising how good you feel. You can even fit into those tight jeans that have been hanging in the back of your closet. It's all good, except for that annoying pain on the outside of your elbow. You pop a few Advil, try some ice...it's no big deal. Maybe you buy a new racquet; get one of those shock absorber devices. Except the pain in your elbow just won't go away. You go see your doctor, try some stronger anti-inflammatory medication, and maybe go get physical therapy. Nothing seems to help. Finally, you even brave a cortisone shot, which helps for a while, but the pain keeps coming back.

Standing on the sidelines, you watch your friends play and listen to their stories of the dreaded condition known as tennis elbow. Better put those jeans away because they're not going to fit much longer. You wonder: "Is this the best the medical community can do for me?"

There is a lot of new research being done on tennis elbow and other similar problems. Your doctor may have called your problem "tendonitis," which is inflammation of a tendon (the structure that attaches your muscle to the bone). There are a lot of treatments for inflammation (i.e. ice, anti-inflammatory medications, cortisone shots and rest). These treatments, however, don't seem to be helping your elbow pain. New research has shown that with many of these types of injuries, the problem doesn't even involve inflammation at all, and that's why anti-inflammatory treatments don't fix them. As the machines that visualize the structures of the human body have gotten better, scientists can now see that the painful tendon is actually degenerating. In a degenerative tendon, healthy tendon cells are replaced by fibrotic (scar) tissue. Even the blood supply in a degenerative tendon looks different – there are actually areas where the tiny blood vessels are not even attached to the main blood lines. By the time a tendon is degenerative – due to injury or overuse – the body has tried to heal itself, but has done so in a very inferior way.

The question then becomes: How do we get the body back on the right track to proper healing? There are a variety of techniques that are currently being done by medical professionals. Injections are one example. In the old days, medical professionals saw that every now and then, cortisone shots worked. New research shows that it is actually the trauma caused by the needle - not the cortisone itself - stimulates a healing response within the tendon. Some doctors are doing multiple needle punctures in problematic tendons and getting fair results. Other doctors are taking some of the patient's blood products and injecting them

back into the tendon to help facilitate healing. Both of these methods are getting some good results, but the procedure can be very painful (multiple injections and blood draws? No thank you!)

There is also a procedure being done that utilizes machines similar to those used to blast kidney stones. With this technique, there has been some promising results treating plantar fasciitis, however, many insurance companies are not covering this procedure. So, what can the weekend athlete do?

There is a new treatment available, right here in Huntington Beach. It is called "ASTYM", which stands for "Augmented Soft Tissue Mobilization." It was developed by a physician and two physical therapists, who then joined with universities and research facilities, to prove that ASTYM was an effective healing technique for tendinosis. Certified ASTYM clinicians have been performing this technique around the United States for over five years and have been getting outstanding and consistent results. It has been found that ASTYM treatment is very effective on healing tennis elbow, even when other treatments or surgeries have failed. For example, over 400 patients with tennis elbow were studied, and it was found that 87 percent were "improved to much improved." (Source: ASTYM Analyst Outcome Report, courtesy of Performance Dynamics).

What is ASTYM?

It is a form of vigorous soft tissue therapy designed to stimulate the body's natural healing process. By working directly on the degenerative tendon, the technique encourages the tendon to heal correctly, rather than incorrectly. ASTYM treatment allows both you and the therapist to feel the soft tissue restrictions that may be contributing to the problem in your elbow. Patients notice that as the tissue smoothes out, their pain decreases and their ability to return to sports (or just lifting a carton of milk) improves.

There are many other diagnoses that respond well to ASTYM treatment, including shoulder pain, plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendonitis, patellar and hip pain. For a full listing of diagnoses that respond well to ASTYM therapy, check out the ASTYM website at: www.astym.com. **HB**

Suzie Freeman, M.P.T., O.C.S., is a staff therapist at California Rehabilitation and a Clinical Faculty Member for the USC School of Physical Therapy. Alan Vogel, PT, OCS, CEAS is owner of CRST whose staff consists of physical therapists with doctoral degrees, who are board-certified orthopedic clinical specialists, as well as physical therapy assistants, athletic trainers and certified strength and conditioning specialists. California Rehabilitation and Sports Therapy is located at 5772 Bolsa Ave., Suite 101, in HB and can