Epicondylitis

Epicondylitis, or "tennis elbow," is an inflammation of the tendons in the elbow that are involved in hand movements.

Why does it appear?

It is caused by tendon overload due to repetitive hand movements during sports, work (carpenters, transport workers, dentists, massage therapists, cleaning staff, computer work, etc.) or domestic activities (cleaning, DIY, etc.).

What discomfort does it cause?

It causes pain on the outside of the elbow when exerting force. In very advanced cases, it can cause pain at rest and also a decrease in strength.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis of epicondylitis is simple and quick, and in most cases it will be made by the family doctor in their office, without the need for any tests (X-ray, ultrasound) or referral to another specialist. It is based on the symptoms described by the patient and a few simple physical examination maneuvers, such as palpating the painful area while performing certain movements with the hand, lifting a chair with the affected arm, etc.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis for epicondylitis is usually good; even without treatment, many cases resolve within a few weeks or months.

Can it be prevented?

It can be prevented by avoiding forced and repetitive hand movements associated with work, sports, or domestic activities that cause pain.

How can it be treated?

There are different treatments to relieve pain and try to reduce its duration:

- Analgesic and anti-inflammatory drugs.
- Glucocorticoid injections (local injection of an anti-inflammatory medication that can be administered by your family doctor in their office).
- Functional bandages (taping).
- Some simple orthopedic devices that are placed on the elbow (bracelets).
- Physical therapy or rehabilitation.

Surgery is required only in very rare cases, with very intense or persistent symptoms that do not resolve with treatment.

Avoid movements that cause pain and lift heavy objects (bags, boxes, etc.) with your palm facing upward.

The affected area will recover more quickly when it is no longer under stress.

Authors: Xavier Mas, M. Edelmira Barraquer and Ximo Moreno
Scientific review: CAMFiC Rheumatology Working Group
Editorial review: CAMFiC Health Education Group
Translation: Quasar Serveis d'Imatge
Pictures: Verònica Monterde