

# ***TRICEPS TENDINITIS***

## **DESCRIPTION**

Inflammation and pain at the triceps tendon (the tendon of the upper arm behind the elbow). This structure is the tendon attachment of the triceps (back of the arm) muscle to the elbow. This structure is important in straightening the elbow or slow the elbow in from bending too quickly. This is usually a grade 1 or 2 strain of the tendon and tends to occur due to overuse. A *Grade 1 strain* is a mild strain. There is a “slight pull” without obvious tearing (it is microscopic tendon tearing). There is no loss of strength and the tendon is the correct length. A *Grade 2 strain* is a moderate strain. There is tearing of fibers within the substance of the tendon or where the tendon meets the bone or muscle. The length of the whole muscle-tendon-bone unit is increased and there is usually decreased strength. A *grade 3 strain* is a complete rupture of the tendon.

## **FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

- Pain, tenderness, swelling, warmth and/or redness over the triceps tendon, above the back of the elbow
- Pain and loss of strength (occasionally) with forcefully straightening the elbow (bench press or push ups)
- Crepitation (a crackling sound) when the tendon is moved or touched

## **CAUSES**

- Strain from sudden increase in amount or intensity of activity or overuse of the triceps muscles and tendon
- Direct blow, laceration (cut) or injury to the triceps tendon.

## **RISK INCREASES WITH**

- Sports that require sudden, explosive triceps contraction, (off road mountain bike or motor cycle riding and jumping)
- Weight lifting, particularly bench press and push ups.
- Poor physical conditioning (strength/flexibility - weak triceps)
- Steroid use

## **PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

- Appropriate warm up and stretching before practice or competition
- Give time for adequate rest and recovery between practices and competition
- Appropriate conditioning:
  - Elbow flexibility, strength and endurance
  - Cardiovascular fitness
- To help prevent recurrence, taping, protective strapping or bracing, or an adhesive bandage may be recommended for several weeks after healing is complete.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOME**

Usually curable within 6 weeks if treated appropriately with conservative treatment and resting the affected area.

## **POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS**

- Healing time will be prolonged if not appropriately treated or if not given adequate time to heal
- Recurrence of symptoms if return to activity is too soon, with overuse, direct blow, or poor technique.
- Untreated, tendinitis may result in tendon rupture requiring surgery

## **GENERAL TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Initial treatment consists of medication and ice to relieve the pain, stretching and strengthening exercises of the triceps and biceps muscles and modifying the activity which initially cause the problem to occur. These all can be carried out at home, though referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer for further evaluation and treatment may be helpful. Rarely, elbow immobilization for 10 to 14 days will be recommended to allow the inflammation to settle down. Occasionally an elbow brace or sleeve may be prescribed. Surgery, to remove the inflamed tendon lining or degenerated tendon tissue is rarely necessary and only after at least 6 months of adequate rehabilitation and rest.

## **MEDICATION**

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin and ibuprofen (do not take if surgery planned in 7 days or less), or other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, are often recommended. Take these as directed by your physician. Contact him/her immediately if any bleeding, stomach upset or an allergic reaction occurs.
- Pain relievers may be prescribed as necessary by your physician. Use only as directed.
- Cortisone injections are not given. Cortisone injections may weaken tendons, so it is better to give the condition more time to heal than to use them.

## **HEAT AND COLD:**

- Cold is used to relieve pain and reduce inflammation for acute and chronic cases. Cold should be applied for 10 - 15 minutes every 2-3 hours for inflammation and pain, and immediately after any activity which aggravates your symptoms. Use ice packs or an ice massage.
- Heat may be used prior to performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your physician, physical therapist or athletic trainer. Use heat pack or a warm soak.

## **NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF**

- Symptoms get worse or do not improve in 2 weeks despite treatment
- You develop a triceps tendon rupture (unable to straighten the elbow under your own power)
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side-effects.