
Understanding and Managing Elbow Pain: A Self-Care Guide

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) and golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis) are diagnoses of microscopic tears to the tendons around your elbow. Both of these conditions are typically caused by an injury or chronic overuse. However, there may also be trigger points in muscles in the forearm or triceps that are contributing to your elbow pain. This guide will cover both acupressure to help relieve pain in your elbow, as well as a great strengthening exercise that I personally use to manage my tennis elbow pain.

Be sure to address the poor movement patterns that created the problem. Tennis elbow often develops when we repeatedly hold items too far from our body. When an object is held at arm's length, all the weight pulls on the small forearm tendons at your elbow. This is like trying to lift a bucket with just your fingertips instead of your whole hand. By simply bringing objects closer to your body before lifting them, you engage the larger, stronger muscles of your upper arm and shoulder. This simple adjustment—keeping objects close to your body when lifting or carrying—can both prevent tennis elbow and support healing if you're already experiencing pain.

The Connection Between Trigger Points and Acupuncture

Trigger points are small, sensitive areas in your muscles that can cause pain both at the point itself and in other areas of your body (referred pain). These points often correspond with traditional acupuncture points, which isn't surprising given our growing understanding of how the body's myofascial (muscle and connective tissue) system overlaps with traditional acupuncture meridians. When you apply pressure to these points, you stimulate the same nerve fibers that respond to acupuncture needles, making self-massage a powerful tool for home care.

Getting Started with Self-Massage

The key to effective self-massage is gentle, sustained pressure rather than aggressive rubbing. You'll need a massage ball - while a tennis ball works to start, I recommend the Yoga Tune Up therapy balls for their durability and perfect density. When working on a point:

- Start with light pressure and gradually increase as the tissue releases
- If you find yourself holding your breath, that's a sign you're using too much pressure
- Spend no more than a couple of minutes on each area.
- Repeat every 2-3 days
- If you experience any nerve sensations (tingling, numbness, or sharp pain), adjust the position of the ball

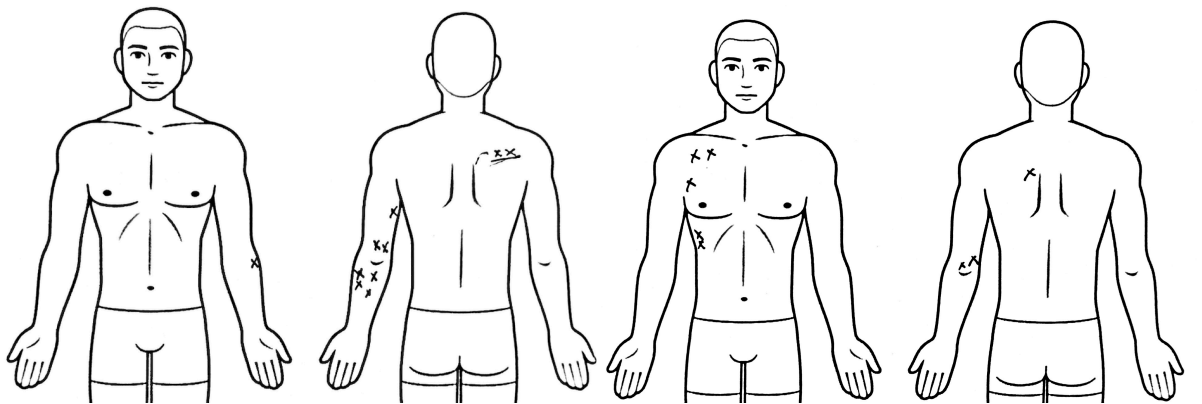
Key Areas to Address

Check these spots for pain on the outside of the elbow: the back of your forearm, the back of your upper arm, just above your shoulder blade.

Check these spots for pain on the inside of the elbow: the back of your upper arm, the upper and outside border of your chest, along the inside edge of your shoulder blade.

****Note:** to locate this last trigger point, you'll need to move the shoulder blade to the outside of the back to get it out of the way. You can easily do this by wrapping the arm on the affected side across your chest, as though giving yourself a hug.

See the illustration below for help locating the common trigger points. Use points on the same side as the affected elbow.



For rolling out the back of the arm above the elbow, I like to hold a ball in one hand to support my knuckles, and then lean the back of my elbow into my knuckles, looking for tender spots.

For the back of the arm, I use a ball against a wall, hold my forearm parallel to the floor, and lean into the ball, looking for tender spots.

Points on the upper back are easily done with a ball against the wall or lying on the floor with the ball underneath you.

For the final spot along the side of your chest, use a ball against the wall, moving your arm out of the way.

Strengthening Exercise—The Tyler Twist

A "Tyler Twist" is an exercise specifically designed to help relieve pain from tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis). You use a Thera-Band FlexBar to perform a twisting motion while keeping your affected wrist extended. It's considered an effective treatment due to the controlled stretching of the tendon under tension while contracting the muscle. [This video demonstrates the "Tyler Twist"](#), and [this video demonstrates the "Reverse Tyler Twist"](#) for golfer's elbow.