

# HEALTHY LIVING

## Overuse injuries – prevention and treatment

**By William D. Cox, Jr., M.D.**

Overuse injuries result from repetitive stress on the tissues of the body leading to tissue breakdown. Common examples of overuse injuries include tennis elbow, rotator cuff tendonitis, and Achilles tendonitis.

During our everyday activities, we break down the tissues of the body.

Fortunately, our bodies have the ability to repair the injured tissue. However, when the rate of breakdown is greater than the rate of repair, the injured tissue becomes painful.

To try to prevent overuse injuries, we should keep our bodies in the best condition possible.

- Smoking – If you smoke, stop. Smoking decreases the blood flow to the tissues of the body.

- Nutrition – Proper nutrition is important. The tissues must have the proper nutrients in order to repair themselves.

- Exercise – Exercise increases the circulation to the tissues bringing nutrients and carrying away waste products. Exercise also improves the quality of the tissue so that it is better able to withstand the demands placed upon it. These demands may include work

activities, housework, yard work, or sporting activities.

When an overuse injury does occur, it should be treated aggressively. The goal of treatment is to stimulate the tissue to heal and then to strengthen it so that it is less susceptible to injury in the future.

Treatment includes: relative rest, proper nutrition, medication, physical therapy, exercise and surgery (rarely required).

- Relative rest – Notice that this is not complete rest, which is actually detrimental to healing. Relative rest means that you may participate in activities or exercises that do not cause harm to the injured extremity, but they do, however, increase metabolism and will stimulate it to heal. For example, if you have Achilles tendonitis, you may not be able to run, but you may be able to bike or swim.

- Proper nutrition – This is important so that the body has the nutrients that will enable it to heal.

- Medications – anti-inflammatory medication or cortisone injections help with pain and may be used if needed. They do not promote healing.

- Physical therapy and exercise – Ultrasound,

electrical stimulation, and other modalities, as well as exercise, all help increase the circulation to the injured tissue and promote healing.

- Surgery – If all of the above treatments fail to alleviate the symptoms, surgery is warranted. However, as stated previously, this is rarely required.

Once the injured tissue has healed, it is very important to strengthen the tissue.

Improving the quality of the tissue decreases the risk of re-injury, and it will be better able to withstand the demands placed upon it. This is achieved with a well supervised exercise program, proper nutrition, and proper rest.

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