

Tendonitis: Be Alert, It May Creep Up On You

Suffering an injury can be a tremendous learning experience and as you probably know many athletes suffer to learn, and learn while suffering. Bowlers around the globe encounter injuries that range from muscle sprains and joint strains to the more severe orthopedic problems. Though not all injuries are career ending or life threatening, most require appropriate medical attention to enable efficient and effective recovery.

I would like to discuss bowler's tendonitis that in many ways is similar to tennis elbow. Bowler's tendonitis, medically termed medial epicondylitis, is the irritation and swelling of the tendons located medially at the elbow joint. Paralleling tennis elbow, it is generally the case that both occur as a result of repetitive motion or stress. In tennis, it results from the constant shock of the racket & ball combination traveling up the arm to the elbow joint. Similarly in bowling, the repetitive motion of the release and delivery of the ball is the main stressor on the forearm muscles and tendons. Though neither seems apparent until the injury has completely occurred, both are forms of cumulative trauma and therefore can creep upon you when least expected. In the following paragraphs we will examine bowler's tendonitis more closely, identify some common causes, and discuss some preventive measures to assist your efforts and increase your recognition of the injury.

Tendonitis

Tendonitis is a nagging ever-present injury that, once developed, never seems to go away without proper care. Ask anyone who has had it and they will reinforce what I'm saying. Tendonitis produces a dull ache or sometimes-sharp piercing pain that persists with most any movement specific to the joint or especially after activity. The amount of pain is directly related to the severity of the injury that also correlates with the amount of medical attention needed.

Many bowlers experience tendonitis throughout a career. **It can develop in the knee, shoulder, wrist, and more commonly the elbow joint (bowler's tendonitis).** These are the most active of all joints sustaining stress while bowling. Some cases are more severe and require greater amounts of treatment, therapy, and recovery. Others demand proper attention of the injured individual implementing various assistive healing measures (those which only assist the healing process). No matter what the specific degree or extent of the injury, tendonitis is both painful and debilitating.

Chronic tendon irritation, commonly known as bowler's tendonitis, is a problem both youth and senior bowlers face frequently. These two populations are specifically at risk and need to be aware of the dangers and preventive measures available to them. Youth bowlers often develop tendonitis from a combination of the remaining growth processes accompanying the cumulative stresses of constant activity or their bowling. Seniors are also at high risk of developing tendonitis primarily from the degenerative processes of the body accompanying a decline in physical fitness level and the stressors of our sport.

4 Factors Affecting the Development of Bowler's tendonitis

Several factors contribute to the risk of acquiring bowler's tendonitis. The presence of these factors does not necessarily cause the problem itself, but rather increase the risk of developing or promoting the injury. Analyze these four factors and see which, if any apply to you.

1. **Poor Posture or Bowling Mechanics** - unnatural movement or undue forces straining the body will increase the risk. **A forced or unnatural release and delivery of the bowling ball places excessive stress on the wrist, elbow, and shoulder joint.** I often see it with younger bowlers who desire to create more hook or generate more revolutions on the bowling ball. In order to do so they succumb to twisting, flipping, and rotating the fingers, wrist, elbow, and shoulder with excessive force in many different directions. **OUCH!!!** Your body may not immediately respond to these undue stresses, but give it time; it will sooner or later relay the message to you.
2. **High Repetition** - avoidance is difficult. This is most noticeable in the work environment. Highly repetitive jobs such as a machinist, computer programmer, or assembly line employee are at greater risk than those whose job is less repetitive. Bowling is a highly repetitive sport and accompanying factor #1, proper mechanics are a must when discussing prevention.
3. **Poor Physical Condition** - weaker or stiffer muscles and joints tend to increase the risk. Joint mobility, flexibility, or range of motion are all terms or phrases used in the exercise community to describe the amount of elasticity or stretchability of a given joint or set of muscles. This is by far one of my main interest areas when dealing with bowling. **A lack of flexibility in a joint most certainly increases the risk of injury.** Stiffer and weaker joints (muscles & tendons) are highly susceptible to the cumulative stress of our sport.

4. **Stretched Span of a Bowling Ball** - increases the strain on the tendons of the fingers and wrist. Physiologically this is uncharted water, but after conferring with some prominent IBPSIA certified pro shop operators, I can comfortably say its awareness is apparent and being viewed as serious. If you are unsure of you bowling grip, have an IBPSIA certified pro shop operator review it with you.

Take Preventive Action

Now that we have defined the most common factors of bowler's tendonitis, we can begin planning the appropriate action toward minimizing the risk of developing the injury. Follow these simple guidelines and give yourself the assurance of knowing your taking the appropriate action.

1. **Eliminate the Factors** - minimizing or hopefully eliminating the influences of tendonitis assist the prevention and or reduction of the risk of injury. Refer to the previous section for specifics concerns. When you eliminate the sources of bowler's tendonitis you are taking adequate steps toward minimizing the risk of developing it. Don't wait for the early warning signs of slight pain or dull aches. **TAKE ACTION NOW!!!**
2. **Early Recognition** - quickly recognizing an injury exists will result in swifter action taken to ensure a productive.3 recovery. The moment you notice any form of pain or discomfort before, during, or especially after bowling, get it examined. Tendonitis is usually recognized initially with a dull ache or slight pain after activity caused by the activity itself irritating the tendons. Don't wait, as so many do until it is a full-blown case of tendonitis. **TAKE ACTION IMMEDIATELY** and be assured it is a false alarm before you assume it. Too many instances do I hear athletes speak of "working through the pain" or "waiting until it goes away." This in nonsense and will only exacerbate and prolong the problem. Seek professional advice from a medical provider.
3. **Yearly Medical Check Up** - once an injury is suspected or determined, act fast. **But wait, don't wait until it has been diagnosed.** Your are already eliminating the causes and looking for early warning signs, so your next step is to allow the professionals of the medical community to do what they do best. Now I'm sure we've all had bad experiences with various medical providers, but that is no reason or excuse to neglect a yearly check up. Let the doctor be the doctor and you and I am the patient.

Do not bowler's tendonitis get a jump on you. Examine the aforementioned elements, take the preventive action, and be assured through the education and awareness **BTM** brings you of doing the right thing.