

Tendinopathy

Condition: Tendinopathy is a tendon injury, sometimes referred to as tendinitis. Tendons link muscles to bone.

Background: Tendinopathy is very common and occurs most often in 30 to 60-year-olds. Most tendinopathy is due to wear and tear on the tendon, either as a natural result of aging, or overuse.

Risk Factors: People who perform repetitive motions either as part of their jobs or while participating in athletics are more at risk for tendinopathy.

History and Symptoms: Tendinopathy often causes pain, inflammation, stiffness and weakness in the affected area.

Physical Exam: A physician will feel the area to check for pain and tenderness. He or she will also check range of motion, such as asking a patient to extend the elbow. Other examinations include observing a patient's posture and movements, to help understand what may have contributed to the problem.

Diagnostic Process: Special tests can be performed that can reproduce tendon pain. A PM&R physician is specially trained to diagnose tendinopathy through their extensive physical exam skills and special tests. For example, the Cozen test is typically used to check for "tennis elbow." The physician gently holds the wrist downward while the patient presses upward against the physician's hand. Then, the physician presses into the outside of the patient's elbow to see how much pain results.

Rehab Management: There are several ways to help manage pain, such as rest, pain medications, icing the area, bracing, physical or occupational therapy, or even an injection. It is also important to make any changes in the kinds of activities that may have led to the tendinopathy so it does not return or worsen. A physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physician can help guide you to the most appropriate treatment plan based on your symptoms, the severity of your pain and your personal goals.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: Often tendinopathy is diagnosed after it is causing significant pain. Patients and families should not only identify problem areas that led to the tendinopathy, but learn to recognize early symptoms, so it does not reoccur or so new tendinopathy does not develop in other areas. A PM&R physician takes into account the whole patient, individualizing treatments and strategies for prevention with the patient's goals and activity level in mind. Together, with your PM&R physician, you can reduce your pain and return to your normal activities.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.