



I've heard of Tennis Elbow but is there such a thing as Technology Elbow?

By Warren Wright, OTR/L, CHT

Certified Hand Therapist at Midwest Therapy Centers, a division of Braaten Health, LLC
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Technology is everywhere these days. Most children have hand held video games to keep them busy. Lap tops and tablets allow us to more easily surf the web and work at home. Cell phones help us communicate better with each other. With this new technology come some unfortunate side effects.

Cell phone elbow has become a common term in the medical field.

Prolonged use of a cell phone can bring on a condition called *cubital tunnel*. Symptoms involve numbness or tingling in the 4th and 5th digits. It can also include pain on the inside of the elbow. This condition can be brought on by prolonged flexion or bending of the elbow. Usually flexing the elbow beyond 90 degrees for an extended period of time can be enough to bring on symptoms.

The ulnar nerve runs along the inside of the elbow; it is also known as your funny bone. With prolonged flexion, the nerve signal to the digits can be slowed or interrupted. It is similar to a kink in a garden hose. The water will slow and not flow normally. The nerve can become inflamed and irritated. That slowed nerve impulse may eventually lead to muscle weakness. Individuals may notice an inability to bring their fingers together, or weakness with grip. If left untreated, contractures or a claw hand may form.

Some simple solutions can resolve this issue.

- Avoiding prolonged flexion of the elbow is helpful.
- For cell phone users, an ear piece may reduce risks.
- Alternate hands while using your cell phone.
- While sleeping, keeps arms along the side of your body. Do not bend them or curl them around your head.
- Resting your elbows on a hard surface can bring on symptoms. So don't use arm rests while at work or on the computer at home.
- Make sure while on the computer that your elbows are not past 90 degrees.



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Other common conditions with all of this new technology include tennis elbow or golfer's elbow.

Pain usually occurs along the inside or outside of the elbow. Weakness in grip may also be present. These conditions may be aggravated by use of a keyboard or hand held video games. It also can become worse with resisted wrist activities.

Tennis elbow and golfer's elbow is also known as *lateral* and *medial epicondylitis* respectively. Muscles along the forearm attach to the elbow by tendons. Repetitive use of the wrist may cause tiny tears along these tendons. When they are not allowed to rest and heal properly, an inflammatory process may develop. Modifying activities can be very helpful with these conditions as well.

- Taking mini breaks can be helpful to allow rest and healing.
- A wrist brace can offer relief.
- Exercise and anti inflammatories can help reduce pain.

It is important to recognize these conditions quickly and get appropriate treatment if symptoms are not improving. A team approach between your physician and a certified hand therapist may help you on your road to recovery. An individual stretching program specifically designed by your therapist would be beneficial to healing. A certified hand therapist is trained in evaluation and treatment of hand, wrist, elbow, and shoulder conditions. They have over 5 years experience in the treatment of upper extremity injuries and a minimum of 2000 hours of direct care.

If you think you may be affected by the conditions described above, or have other upper extremity issues that may benefit from a certified hand therapist, please feel free to call Warren Wright, OTR/L, CHT at Midwest Therapy Centers, 563-326-1400. Midwest Therapy Centers has 4 outpatient locations in the QCA and Clinton area with hours Monday – Friday 8am to 5pm or by appointment. Remember, you have a choice of health care providers! Ask your doctor to send you to Midwest Therapy Centers, a Division of Braaten Health LLC.