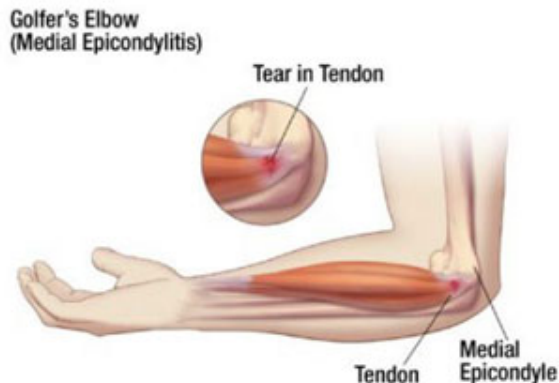


# One Nagging Injury

by Rob Bush 05\_01\_06

About 4 years ago or so, late in 2002, I was moving some awkward sized product in the warehouse at my job. My left arm was fully stretched out behind me holding the edge of a box. I, along with another individual, was stacking these boxes of product in a quick manner. As we went along doing this, I felt a strain occur on the inside of my left elbow. Thinking nothing of this, I kept on until the job was completed.

Strains were nothing new to me since my style of training was based on power lifting movements. I was always pulling something or straining a muscle. This was just part of the territory in my book. You got to pay to play. Over the next few weeks the strain in my left elbow did heal and I forgot about it. That is until the next time I had a heavy day of dead lifting. My final pull of that day was with a handsome amount of weight, 500lbs to be exact. I moved the weight with out any problems, or at least I thought so. At the top of the movement, holding the weight, I felt a deep burn on the inside of my left elbow. I knew it was the same area that I had aggravated a few weeks back at work. I put the weight down and knew I had once again caused myself another strain. What I did not realize at the time was that I would be going under the knife 4 years later to correct this injury that would never heal.



The injury that I incurred on myself that day is what is known as medial epicondylitis. This is better known as "golfer's elbow." This is the exact opposite of the more common "tennis elbow" or lateral epicondylitis. The main symptoms are elbow pain and weakness. The pain can be referred and spread into the surrounding areas around the elbow. In my case, it was not only on the inside of the elbow, but also on the inside of the forearm. My grip was also affected to a degree. The pain was quite chronic at times too.

Both golfer's elbow and tennis elbow are normally the result of overuse of the forearm and wrist muscles. Degeneration of the tendons can occur and this is what causes the injury to become painful. Repetitive movements during work or exercise only seem to make the symptoms much worse. This injury can also be the result of a direct blow to the area, which was the reason in my case. My elbow had never completely healed from the work injury, so dead lifting a heavy weight pushed it beyond what the elbow could handle that day.

After the injury, I made some minor modifications to my training. I could still do everything I normally did except dead lift with the left hand in the over position on

the bar. I simply reversed the over under from my left hand to my right hand and this took all the pressure off the injured elbow. Still, the elbow was hurting me and I tried some basic therapy of RICE, (rest & ice.) This worked slightly, but pain was still obvious. I also tried heat therapy too. After a month of it not getting better, I made an appointment to see my orthopedic doctor. The doctor diagnosed it as golfer's elbow and offered me the famous steroid shot to knock the inflammation out. I took it right away. I have used cortisone steroid therapy in the past with great success. It is not the demon people have made it out to be and can help the body jumpstart the healing process. Relief was mine within a few hours and I was a new man again. I figured that was all I needed. Little did I know that would not be the case. I continued training as I always had. After a good six months or so, I once again noticed the pain start to return in my elbow. I saw my doctor again and received a second shot. Just part of the treatment, for I knew that with certain injuries, it may take several shots to knock it out of you. Anyways, life went on.

The same thing eventually happened again. By this time it was 2004. I figured I would try to get better myself and sought out my chiropractor for help. He treated me with electric stimulation, ice & heat, as well as some deep tissue massage. The massage hurt like crazy, and in my opinion, made my elbow even more chronic. I was taking Advil, Aleve, and Motrin. I started taking high doses of Vitamin C because it is a natural anti-inflammatory. I tried DMSO and every kind of topical rub out there. I mixed all these combinations together at different times, but nothing really seemed to help. I was still training hard, but certain movements were starting to become problematic. Simple pull ups were causing me great pain as well as squats. The bar sitting on my back, laying in my hands and pushing into the elbow area was death to me. I eventually just wrapped my arms around the bar to get around this problem. I just knew it had to get better on it's own at some point. I even tried taking weeks off at a time to see if total rest would heal it. It would not.

Late in 2004, I went to a different doctor for another opinion. He basically confirmed what the previous doctor diagnosed me with. This time, however, I had an MRI taken. The results of the MRI were consistent with golfer's elbow. The doctor recommended that I have my elbow operated on with a procedure called "debreeding." This is where they open your elbow up and go in and clean out any damaged tissue that will not heal and may even have to grind the elbow bone down some. At the time, I felt he was wrong. He gave me a third shot, but stated that if I came back again, surgery was the next logical step.

Like clockwork the pain did return. I once again treated it myself until around spring of 2005. I went to see my original doctor and explained to him the MRI findings. He again felt the injury needed to be treated conservatively, as did I, and gave me a fourth cortisone shot. Again, I felt like new shortly after the injection and returned to my training like normal. You know what happens next. The pain returned about four months later. I had developed a bad head cold at the time and went to see my local general doctor for a check up. I asked him if he could give me a cortisone shot in my elbow and he said he could. So, I received a fifth shot from him. The problem was, he did not give it to me correctly and it never took effect. It was a wasted effort on his part and mine.

I continued to treat it myself until I had the opportunity to go see my first doctor yet again. He gave me a sixth cortisone shot and reassured me that I did not need surgery just yet. He told me that I could receive several more shots before he would consider surgery. This was late in 2005.

When 2006 rolled around, I knew I needed to see an elbow specialist. I found one at a famous clinic 2 hours from me. The initial consultation with the new doctor went extremely well. He took regular x-rays of the elbow and it revealed the development of bone spurs in the area. These spurs were rubbing on the ulna nerve. This nerve is more commonly known as the funny bone. Compression of this nerve is called "Cubital Tunnel Syndrome". Symptoms of this are numbness and tingling in the ring and pinky fingers of the hand along with a dull ache in the elbow area. I was experiencing both of these. By this point, I could not fully stretch my arm out without pain, nor could I bend it fully without pain. Simple tasks were becoming painful. Things like brushing my teeth, opening a jar, flushing the toilet, and holding the phone caused me a great deal of discomfort. My training also suffered. I could no longer do power cleans, pull ups, dead lifts, front squats, and throw a medicine ball. It all just hurt too bad. My new doctor had me return in 2 weeks for another MRI as well as an EMG nerve test. These 2 tests revealed everything the doctor thought. There was tendon and muscle damage along with the compressed ulna nerve. I needed to have surgery, no doubt this time. The doctor told me I should have had it done 2 years ago. Live and learn!

On April 11th, 2006, I had the procedure done. The surgery went well. The doctor had to trim away some damaged tendon and shave a little bit off the inside of the elbow. He cleaned out the bone fragments and deposits and also moved the ulna nerve to the inside of the elbow out of the inflamed area. The area opened up is about 8 inches or so in length. Check out the pictures.



These were taken a week after the surgery. It looks much worse than it is. I already am able to extend my arm fully and bend it fully. I began physical therapy on it too. The therapy involves basic range of motion exercises along with isometric resistance and some heat with electric stimulation. I also am doing these treatments at home too. The scarring will be minimal. It will take about 8 to 12 weeks to get the elbow back to 75%. Since I already have good muscle integrity, I am told my recovery should be half the time it would normally take an individual who does not train. This is a benefit from leading a lifestyle of exercise and fitness. Initially, I am not permitted to do more than the doctor and physical therapists recommends. That means no weight training with the healing arm. That does not mean no exercise however. I have spent much of the past 2 weeks since the surgery doing little activity geared toward training. That is about to change.

With this kind of surgery, I must take the healing process seriously. It will not benefit me to push the area that was fixed beyond the normal expectations. Though

I cannot do a lot of upper bodywork right now, I still have half my body of which I can continue to train, just so I do not aggravate the healing of the elbow in any way. That being said, here are some things I can and will be doing while I go through the healing process with my elbow. Everything is based off of Renegade Training methods.

Cardiovascular training \*(examples):

Running

Sprint work

Jump rope (as long as there is no discomfort on the elbow region)

GPP work \*(examples):

Body squats

Shuffle splits

Jumping jacks

Russian lunges

One leg hops

Run in place

Butt kicks

High knees

Hip mobility work:

Hurdle step over

Fire hydrant

Leg sweep over

Duck under

Medicine ball - footwork:

Foot pass forward

Vertical jump scoop between feet

Vertical jump reverse pass

Core/abdominal work (examples):

Planks

Med ball torso twists

Med ball leg raise between feet

Swiss ball crunches

Leg raise

Superman's

Horse poses

Dynamic Stretching:

Pink yoga (using discretion)

There is no reason that I cannot continue to train my body during this time of rehab and healing with my elbow. Good old common sense will allow me to work with the healing process and still produce positive results. Though I am limited right now, I know that in good time I will be back to doing what I want soon, better than ever. I have learned a lot from this process and hope that perhaps I have shed some light on this kind of injury. It is not the worst thing in the world, but it sure can be a chronic problem if it is not addressed correctly. Pay attention to the warning signs and if need be, go get it checked out.

ROB BUSH  
the 'Burgh | rtrain@yahoo.com

Rob began training back in the early 80's being drawn to working out by some of the bodybuilding's great names. He is a fitness enthusiast who raced amateur motocross for 3 years in the late 80s. Rob dove into power lifting back the mid 90's and plans to begin recruiting clients to personal train R-Style in the Macon area. Rob is also a well accomplished trumpet player who has performed in various ensembles through the years from grade school thru college and beyond. He studied privately for 6 years. Fitness-wise, Rob has worked in several training centers over the years.