

The Elbow

Injury prevention and healing

You need strong forearms to prevent elbow injuries. I'll bet if you do have elbow pain your forearms aren't as condition as they should be. The remedy is to do forearm strengthening exercises along with proper hand position when working upper body with barbells and machines.

It's important to do upper body pushing and pulling exercises with hands in a user-friendly position. This is best achieved with dumbbells. Since you can rotate the dumbbells there is little stress on the wrist and elbow. Barbells put the hands in elbow unfriendly positions during pushing and pulling movements and when the thumbs are wrapped tightly around the barbell stress is aimed at the elbow. Here's how:

Outer elbow (aka 'tennis elbow') caused by excessive pronation when a straight bar is pulled toward the body with an overhand grip as in wide grip chins, straight bar pulldowns, bent over rowing, barbell upright row. Barbells are the culprit since the hand is locked to the bar and can't rotate stress is put on the elbow. The wrist too. Of course, you can get outer elbow trauma from hard back hand hits in tennis. I even got this injury years ago from slamming my car door after a hard workout.

Inner elbow caused by excessive supination when the arm is straight with elbow locked. This happens when you are doing barbell curls, and you straighten your arms out completely as the weight comes back to the starting position. The hands aren't used to hanging at this angle, you can check it for yourself by letting your arms hang naturally by your sides. How are they hanging? In a neutral grip position. When dumbbells go back to starting position in the curl you are able to rotate the dumbbells into a neutral grip. Can't do this with a barbell so the inner elbow takes a hit.



So, if your elbows hurt try doing all your curls with dumbbells. And do forearm work too. Here's where the barbell comes in, it's one of the few times I actually use a barbell anymore: barbell wrist curls for the inner elbow and barbell reverse wrist curl for the outer elbow. I suggest doing both these exercises, two sets of 20 reps each at the beginning of your upper body workouts. This warms up the forearms, elbows, and grip. Before you begin rub some liniment (if it's really sore) and put a loose elastic bandage over it. Super set wrist curl with reverse wrist curl and you will thoroughly warm up this area. Reduce the weight on reverse wrist curl as it is a stricter movement. Do this movement slowly and hold the contraction for half a second in the finish position.

These are the two safest movements, start light, keep the elbows warm and do your reps. When the elbows start feeling a bit better you can add pronation/supination exercises. One example comes to mind and that is baton twirling. Get a baton or a light bar, hold it in the middle and twirl slowly: right hand counterclockwise twirl strengthens inner elbow, opposite direction strengthens outer elbow.

Don't have a baton? Try dumbbell turnovers. Put a light fixed weight dumbbell on the floor, and with your forearm resting on floor grasp the dumbbell. Using your right hand, turning left works inner elbow (supination), turning right works outer elbow (pronation).

Finishing up your arm workout with a gripper is a good idea too. This will strengthen your forearms and help your elbows feel better. You can always squeeze a tennis ball if you have tennis elbow.

Another good forearm strengthening exercise is wrist roller, you can easily make one. Get a 1.5 inch diameter PVC tubing or a round dowell about the size of the handle on a baseball bat, drill a hole in the middle, insert a 4 foot length of rope, tie a knot at one end and insert a light weight (5 to 10 pounds) at

the other end of the rope, hold arms out straight in front of you and raise the weight by winding the rope around the handle. Then rewind it back down.

Reverse curl with strengthen this area too but don't start with these until the pain is almost gone and then start very light. Using a light weight doing slow negatives on this exercise is the best way to do it and don't be afraid to gradually push your repetition up to 20.

Healing elbow pain depends on not doing exercises that hurt it. Be careful of machines in general and curling machines in particular. Any exercises that fix your hands in a position that doesn't rotate may put excessive stress on this area. Remember, if it hurts, don't do it.