

Neutral Grip



I feel I know a lot about injuries because I've had lots over the course of many years of training. Such experience has given me the opportunity to analyze what caused the injury and how to strengthen and cure it. One such case is the outer elbow (tennis elbow) caused by pulling motions done with an overhand grip.

I became aware of such hazard after suffering this injury on my left elbow training the summer of 1971 in south Africa. I'd been doing lots of wide grip chins and wide grip bent over barbell row. Training six hours 6 days a week left little time for corrective measures or healing, and I was reminded of it every time I flexed my arm. I didn't learn about the neutral grip until years later.

A grip is neutral when the palms are held facing each other whether holding wide or narrow. I no longer do chins but do pulldowns with a wide neutral grip bar. Pulldowns give me a greater range of motion since I can control a lighter weight, and I don't have to wrestle pulling up my bodyweight. I can hit the major lat working area by pulling down into the area between my chin and upper chest. This is usually inaccessible with front chins because you usually only pull yourself to your chin. After all it's called a chin up. And there is no such thing as 'chin behind neck.' Literally.

So, it's neutral grip pulldowns instead of wide grip chins which hurt my elbows. What about barbell bent over row? I've substituted two exercises here, both good lat builders. They are leverage or t bar rows and low cable rows. Best way I've found to do leverage row is to stick a 7 foot Olympic bar in a corner, load one end with small diameter plates 10 and 25 pound plates, grip with interlaced fingers near one end of the bar as you straddle it, keep upper back parallel to the floor with knees slightly bent, pull up bar until plates touch chest and the stretch all the way down rounding your back at the bottom of the rep. This is a great mass building, better than low cable row but not as comfortable or user friendly. With low cable row I'm sitting up not bent over and it's easier to keep stress off my lower back, that's why I prefer it.

Rowing with dumbbells enables you to rotate your wrist into neutral grip position and I really like one arm dumbbell row for this reason. In heavy contest training working up to 3 sets of 10 reps with 100-, 110-, and 120-pound DB made me feel really wide with my lats hanging way out to each side. One arm lat stretch between sets put the finishing touches on my lat workout.

So, it came down to 3 exercises all done with a neutral grip to give me a pain free great lat work. Worked for me so if you have tennis elbow issues try using a neutral grip on pulling motions. And be careful hitting backhanded when playing tennis.