

My Elbow Hurts When I Open a Door

Understanding Outer Elbow Pain with Gripping

Why Does Opening a Door Hurt My Elbow?

The motion of turning a doorknob or door handle requires the forearm to pronate (rotate palm-down) and the wrist extensors to stabilize the grip. This is exactly the movement pattern that loads the lateral epicondyle — the outer bony prominence of the elbow — and the tendons attached to it. If you wince every time you turn a handle, open a jar, or shake someone's hand, lateral epicondylalgia (tennis elbow) is almost certainly the cause.

This is one of the most diagnostically revealing complaints in elbow pain. The specificity of this symptom to that particular motion points almost directly at the lateral elbow structures.

Other Daily Activities That Cause the Same Pain

- Turning a key in a lock
- Lifting a kettle or coffee pot with the palm facing down
- Gripping and twisting — a screwdriver, a bottle cap, a steering wheel
- Shaking hands
- Clicking and scrolling with a computer mouse
- Carrying a bag by the handle with elbow extended

What Does the Pain Feel Like?

- A sharp pain on the outer side of the elbow with the specific movement
- An aching forearm that lingers after activity
- Tenderness when pressing the outer elbow bone
- Weakness — surprising difficulty holding even light objects
- Morning stiffness that eases with gentle movement

How Did This Develop?

- Usually develops gradually from repetitive overuse — no single injury

- A change in work demands — new job, new tool, increased volume
- Computer work — sustained mouse use is a very common and underrecognized cause
- Manual work, cooking, construction, or any task involving sustained gripping

What Can I Do Right Now?

- Avoid palm-down gripping when possible — try turning handles with palm up or use your other hand temporarily
- A counterforce brace (tennis elbow strap) worn just below the elbow can reduce pain during activity
- Ice the outer elbow for 10–15 minutes after aggravating activities
- Begin physical therapy — early treatment leads to faster resolution

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Severe swelling or bruising following an acute injury
- Numbness or tingling into the hand (may indicate nerve involvement)
- Complete inability to grip anything

The Good News

This very specific and frustrating symptom resolves very reliably with targeted physical therapy. By progressively loading and strengthening the extensor tendons, modifying activities, and addressing technique, the vast majority of patients get back to all their daily activities — including opening every door in the house — without pain.

Targeted PT reliably resolves this complaint for most patients within **6 to 12 weeks**.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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