



Joint effort

A breakthrough treatment gives golfer's elbow sufferers a shot at pain-free golf. BY DANIEL HOY

You're standing on the tee, the weather is perfect, the sun's shining and not a breath of wind is blowing. Then it happens... after your first swing you feel a slight twinge in your elbow. You ignore it and finish your round. But then a few days or even weeks later, the true nature of that slight pain presents itself. And when it does it can prevent you from playing, practising and can also impact your everyday life.

Every golfer has, or knows someone who has, suffered from the debilitating condition commonly known as golfer's elbow. At best the condition comes and goes, causes pain, but does not restrict when a golfer can play. At worst it stops you from playing at all and affects you every day off the course.

Golfer's elbow is caused by a combination of factors. It's related to the posture required to play golf, degeneration of the tendon and overuse.

Younger golfers generally end up with the condition as a result of overuse, while for the older golfer it is a combination of degeneration and playing too much golf.

Traditionally, treatment has involved rest, blood injections or cortisone. At best these approaches have a 50 per cent success rate. A new treatment being



trialled in Melbourne is providing those suffering from any form of tendinitis with hope, and helping many get back to doing what they love – playing golf. The breakthrough treatment, discovered at the University of Western Australia, is being pioneered by West Australian company Orthocell. The treatment has also been tested on other people suffering chronic tendon injuries.

Orthocell is sponsoring the first double blind randomised study in the area of cell therapies in the world. This study is being conducted in conjunction with one of the world's leading tendon research groups

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Melbourne-based specialist Dr George Koulouris has successfully treated amateur golfers using the technology.

"We have worked with a few golfers, who have had very good results," Dr Koulouris says. "It is like any normal tendinopathy, so we would expect the great results we've had with patella tendinopathy to continue.

"When treating golfer's elbow with cortisone we find that after 12 months the success rate is 50 per cent, which is still pretty good – it's a flip of the coin. With ATI (Autologous Tenocyte Injection) we are finding it is better than 70 or 80 per cent. But we do have small numbers and it is early days, but so far the success rate has been good."

Dr Koulouris says he expects more people to use the technology once it becomes widely known. He also predicts the same treatment could be used to speed up recovery from other injuries. "In the future I could also see it working with muscle tears and muscle strains. Muscles at some point attach to a tendon, so by extrapolation it should work."