

Shock Wave Technology to Treat Tennis Elbow: An Alternative to Surgery

A quick and nearly painless shock wave therapy used to treat ailing elbows is offering promising results and saving patients from more painful surgical options. Doctors at The Methodist Hospital are nearing the end of a clinical study tracking about 60 patients suffering from lateral epicondylitis, more commonly called tennis elbow.

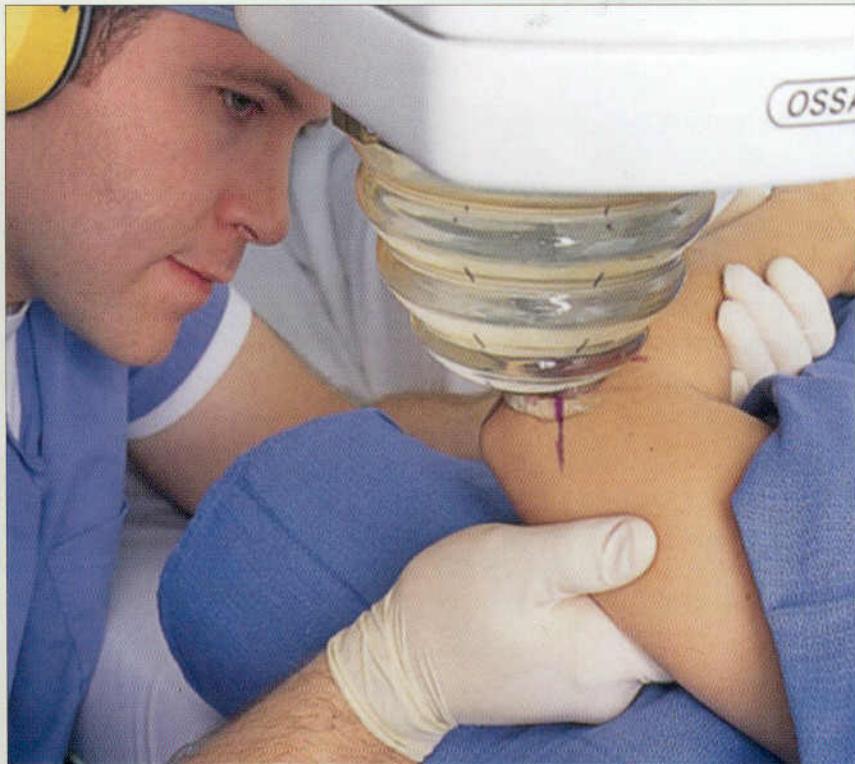
"More than half of the patients who were going to have surgery didn't need to have surgery afterward,"

said Dr. Evan Collins, an orthopedic surgeon at The Methodist Hospital. "That, to me, is success," added Collins.

Tennis elbow affects from 1 to 3 percent of the population. It is a common overuse injury that affects active people usually from ages 30 to 60, and it can lead to pain and limit function. The majority of patients treated for tennis elbow have never played the sport, but the condition earned its nickname because it affects up to half of those who do play tennis. Treatment generally includes medication, exercises and physical therapy, rest and, as a last resort, surgery to correct the problem and relieve the pain.

Collins used OssaTron Treatments on his study patients. The procedure includes numbing the arm with a regional anesthetic, then using the OssaTron machine to apply Extracorporeal Shockwave (ESW) therapy. "The shock waves are produced by the machine. It takes about six minutes – then it's done," said Collins. "There's very little recovery time. You still do the physical therapy and wear braces that you wore before when doing stretching exercises, so it's not like you walk out free," added Collins.

"About six to eight weeks afterward, people feel an improvement. If patients don't feel an improvement within three months, they are eligible for the shock wave therapy again without any harm incurred," Collins said.



OssaTron Treatments are now approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and Collins can offer them to any eligible patient.

OssaTron technology uses high energy shock waves similar to those used to treat kidney stones. To date, the treatment has proven effective on 90 percent of patients treated, with more than 60 percent reporting good to excellent results. The shock wave technology works directly on

the affected area, disrupting scar tissue and reducing inflammation. It stimulates formation of new blood vessels to repair the injury. The technology, which is reported to cause only minor soreness, has been used successfully to treat injuries like plantar fasciitis and heel spurs.

So far, the amount of time patients wait to treat their tennis elbow has no effect on whether or not the shock waves work. Many people deal with the pain for six months or more before seeking treatment. "If it's self-limiting, it usually goes away, but it may take six months to a year," Collins said. And even those who come in sooner are treated first with exercises, anti-inflammatory drugs, rest and physical therapy before surgery is considered.

Surgery involves an incision, two weeks of recovery time post-op, a splint, the risk of infection, soreness and the need for additional therapy.

"Now, instead of waiting six months to have an operation or doing multiple cortisone shots, maybe this is the alternative," said Collins.

The protocol following the procedure is well-defined and easy to do, said Collins, making the surgery available to patients anywhere in the world.

"The point is that it's an alternative to surgery," he said. "And it may be an alternative to repeated cortisone shots and waiting it out to see if it gets better."