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Comparing surgery and physiotherapy for people with long-lasting tennis elbow: a feasibility study

Submission date
10/07/2026

Recruitment status
Not yet recruiting

Registration date
20/07/2026

Overall study status
Ongoing

Last Edited
20/07/2026

Condition category
Musculoskeletal Diseases

[X] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[_] Results
[_] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Tennis elbow causes pain on the outside of the elbow and can make everyday activities difficult. Most people improve with physiotherapy, but some continue to have symptoms for many months. Surgery is sometimes offered, but we do not know whether surgery or physiotherapy works best for long-lasting tennis elbow. This study will test whether it is feasible to run a full trial comparing surgery with physiotherapy.

Who can participate?
Adults aged 18 years or over with tennis elbow affecting one arm, with symptoms lasting at least 6 months

What does the study involve?
Participants will be randomly allocated to either surgery or a structured physiotherapy programme. They will complete questionnaires at baseline and again at 3, 6, and 12 months. Some participants and clinicians will be invited to take part in an interview about their experiences.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The surgery offered as part of this study is used in routine NHS practice and the physiotherapy programme brings together elements of established practice; therefore, it is not anticipated that there are any ethical issues relating to our choice of treatments. Participants may benefit from receiving a structured treatment pathway. Risks relate mainly to surgery (such as infection or stiffness) or temporary discomfort during physiotherapy exercises. All risks are explained in the patient information sheet.

Where is the study run from?
The study is coordinated by the York Trials Unit at the University of York (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
August 2026 to October 2028

Who is funding the study?
The NIHR Health Technology Assessment Programme (UK)

Who is the main contact?
York Trials Unit, ytu-sore-elbow-trial@york.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator

Contact name
Prof Harvinder Singh

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8686-2802

Contact details
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, Leicester Royal Infirmary, Infirmary Square
Leicester
United Kingdom
LE1 5WW
-
harvinder.singh16@nhs.net

Type(s)
Scientific

Contact name
Dr Marcus Bateman

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3203-506X

Contact details
Derby Shoulder Unit, University Hospitals of Derby & Burton NHS Foundation Trust, Royal Derby Hospital, Uttoxeter Road
Derby
United Kingdom
DE22 3NE
-
marcus.bateman@nhs.net

Type(s)
Public

Contact name
Mrs Liz Cook

ORCID ID

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6902-0235

Contact details
York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, ARRC Building, University of York, Heslington
York
United Kingdom
YO10 5DD
+44 (0)1904 321522
liz.cook@york.ac.uk

Additional identifiers

Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)
351965

Central Portfolio Management System (CPMS)
65740

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
170489

Study information

Scientific Title
Surgery or Rehabilitation for persistent tennis elbow: SORE Elbow Feasibility Trial

Acronym
SORE Elbow

Study objectives
Primary objective:
To assess the feasibility of conducting a full randomised controlled trial comparing surgical debridement with standardised physiotherapy rehabilitation for persistent tennis elbow

Secondary objectives:
1. Determine recruitment rates, eligibility, approach, consent and randomisation numbers across sites
2. Assess adherence to physiotherapy and exercise programmes
3. Evaluate retention at 3, 6 and 12 months
4. Assess feasibility of collecting clinical, qualitative and health economic data
5. Explore patient and clinician experiences of trial participation and intervention acceptability

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 14/07/2026, Tyne & Wear South Research Ethics Committee (NHSBT Newcastle Blood Donor Centre, Holland Drive, Newcastle, NE2 4NQ, United Kingdom; +44 (0)207 104 8014; tyneandwearsouth.rec@hra.nhs.uk), ref: 26/NE/0122

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Tennis elbow

Interventions
Participants are randomised in a 1:1 ratio between treatments, stratified by site and completed via REDCap centrally to ensure allocation concealment.

Surgical arm:
Open or arthroscopic debridement of the extensor origin for tennis elbow, performed under local, regional or general anaesthesia. Postoperative physiotherapy is not standardised and will be recorded pragmatically.

Physiotherapy arm:
A standardised rehabilitation programme based on the NIHR OPTimisE Trial, including education, progressive loading exercises, and lifestyle advice. Additional physiotherapy treatments will be recorded pragmatically.

Intervention Type
Mixed

Primary outcome(s)
Recruitment rate, defined as the proportion of eligible participants who go on to be randomised, measured using screening and enrolment data at the point of randomisation

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Recruitment metrics: screening, eligibility, approach, consent and randomisation numbers measured using site logs continuously throughout recruitment period
2. Time to surgery: time from randomisation to surgical procedure measured using surgical CRF from post randomisation until surgery
3. Physiotherapy attendance and timing: number of sessions attended and time to first session, meaasured using physio CRF post randomisation
4. Exercise adherence measured using the Exercise Adherence Rating Scale (EARS) at 3, 6 and 12 months
5. Retention: completion of follow-up questionnaires measured using follow-up CRFs at 3, 6 and 12 months

Exploratory clinical outcomes:
1. Pain and function measured using the Patient-Rated Tennis Elbow Evaluation (PRTEE) questionnaire at baseline, intervention delivery, 3, 6, 12 months
2. Health-related quality of life measured using EQ 5D 5L at baseline, intervention delivery, 3, 6, 12 months
3. Pain on gripping measured using the Numerical Rating Scale (NRS) at baseline, intervention

delivery, 3, 6, 12 months
4. Work limitation and time off work measured using work limitation questionnaire at baseline, 3, 6, 12 months
5. Health resource utilisation measured using resource use questionnaire at intervention delivery, 3, 6, 12 months

Completion date
31/10/2028

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Adults (aged ≥18 years) with unilateral tennis elbow characterised by ≥6 months of lateral elbow pain
2. Pain on palpation of the common extensor origin and pain on gripping
3. Positive Cozen's, Mills' or Maudsley's test

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
100 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
1. Suspected tumour or infection around the elbow
2. Recent significant elbow trauma or previous elbow surgery likely to affect outcomes
3. Cervical pain or radiculopathy that may be causing lateral elbow pain
4. Medial or anterior or posterior elbow pain in the same elbow, or pain in the contralateral elbow
5. Pregnancy
6. Comorbidities preventing surgical intervention

Date of first enrolment
01/08/2026

Date of final enrolment
30/04/2027

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Scotland

Study participating centre
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
Leicester Royal Infirmary
Infirmary Square
Leicester
England
LE1 5WW

Study participating centre
University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Derby Hospital
Uttoxeter Road
Derby
England
DE22 3NE

Study participating centre
Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
Airedale General Hospital
Skipton Road
Steeton
Keighley
England
BD20 6TD

Study participating centre
James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Lowestoft Road
Gorleston
Great Yarmouth
England
NR31 6LA

Study participating centre
South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust
Sunderland Royal Hospital
Kayll Road
Sunderland
England
SR4 7TP

Study participating centre
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust
University Hospital of Hartlepool
Holdforth Road
Hartlepool
England
TS24 9AH

Study participating centre
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary
Wigan Lane
Wigan
England
WN1 2NN

Study participating centre
Lothian
Waverleygate
2-4 Waterloo PLACE
Edinburgh
City of Edinburgh
Scotland
EH1 3EG

Study participating centre
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
John Radcliffe Hospital
Headley Way
Headington
Oxford
England
OX3 9DU

Study participating centre
North Bristol NHS Trust
Southmead Hospital
Southmead Road
Westbury-on-trym
Bristol
England
BS10 5NB

Sponsor information

Organisation
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

ROR
https://ror.org/02fha3693

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
National Institute for Health and Care Research

Alternative Name(s)
National Institute for Health Research, NIHR Research, NIHRresearch, NIHR - National Institute for Health Research, NIHR (The National Institute for Health and Care Research), NIHR

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be available upon reasonable request after the publication of the study results from York Trials Unit (ytu-sore-elbow-trial@york.ac.uk). Requests will be reviewed by the Trial Management Group. Data will be anonymised before sharing.

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Study website			17/07/2026	No	No