

"I felt like I got shot in the back of the leg," my friend Tom said after a particularly intense pickleball match last weekend. You've probably heard a similar story on the courts or maybe even experienced it yourself. A sudden, sharp pain can make you think you've sustained a dramatic injury like an **Achilles rupture** or a severe calf muscle tear. But in my nine years covering orthopedics and recreational athletes, and playing morning pickleball twice a week, I've learned that most of these injuries are less about a single traumatic moment and more about *overuse and frequency*.

In this post, I'm breaking down what might really be happening when you get that snapshot feeling in your calf, why aging tendons play a big role, and how other common pickleball injuries—like rotator cuff irritation and elbow pain—are often the byproducts of repetitive stress and mechanics rather than sudden trauma. Plus, I'll share practical tips on why you absolutely should **not play through it**, and how some athletes are finding relief with natural options like Joy Organics' organic CBD gummies. Photo credit for the energizing pickleball action goes to Brendan Sapp / Unsplash.

Understanding the "Shot in the Back of the Leg" Sensation

Many players describe feeling like they were "shot" or "stabbed" in the back of their leg, often during a fast pivot, sprint, or leap. Let's untangle what might be happening anatomically and why the grim sensation isn't always the full story.

Calf Tear Symptoms vs. Achilles Rupture Possibility: What's What?

The calf muscle complex includes the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles that connect to the Achilles tendon before attaching to the heel bone. If you get a sudden sharp pain in that region, the two primary concerns are:

- **Calf muscle tear (strain):** A partial or full tear in the muscle fibers often accompanied by sudden pain, swelling, and difficulty walking but without complete loss of foot movement.
- **Achilles tendon rupture:** A more severe injury where the tendon actually tears, resulting in a popping sound, immediate weakness, an inability to push off the foot, and sometimes a visible gap above the heel.

While both injuries can feel dramatic, the Achilles rupture is the most serious and demands urgent medical attention. If you suspect this, don't hesitate—see a doctor immediately.

Why Overuse and Frequency Are the Real Culprits

What annoys me most on the courts is when players blame their paddle or one awkward hit for their tendon pain. Nine times out of ten, I ask, "What changed in the last two weeks?" and the answer is usually increased practice frequency, more games back-to-back, or skipping warm-ups.

Overuse leads to micro-injuries that, unless recovered from properly, accumulate and reduce the tendons' ability to handle sudden loads. Aging tendons adapt slower and don't bounce back as quickly as they did a decade ago. This means a quick dash across the court can feel like a gunshot if those tendons are already frayed.

So: it's not just the "one moment"—it's the repeated stress, often without the rest or warm-up the body desperately needs.

Aging Tendons: Why Pickleball Players Over 40 Notice It More

We all know time changes us—but your tendons? They change too. As we age, tendons become stiffer, less elastic, and slower to repair themselves. This biological shift means they tolerate sudden, forceful maneuvers less well.

For veteran pickleballers, this often shows up as a nagging ache before a sudden incident causes an injury that is, frankly, preventable.

Signs Your Tendons Might Be At Risk

- You notice stiffness or soreness after a match that lingers more than 48 hours.
- Stretching or warming up takes longer to ease discomfort than it used to.
- Sudden movements cause sharp, stabbing sensations rather than just muscle burn.

Consistent monitoring and respecting these signs is crucial. Counting warm-up [shoulder mobility for pickleball](#) minutes out loud (I even do it on the court!) helps ensure you don't rush the prep phase and inadvertently stress aging tendons.

Rotator Cuff Irritation: Night Pain and Behind-the-Back Reach Problems

While a sharp leg pain often grabs attention, don't overlook shoulder challenges that are common among players who swing hard all day. Rotator cuff tendons are delicate, and overuse or improper mechanics will show up quite specifically.

How to Spot Rotator Cuff Issues

- **Night pain:** Waking up with a dull ache in the shoulder or difficulty lying on the affected side.
- **Restricted behind-the-back reach:** Trouble reaching behind your back to grab something or fasten a jacket.
- **Weakness with overhead or lateral swings:** Decreased power or discomfort when performing pickleball strokes.

If these symptoms sound familiar, consider consulting an orthopedist or physical therapist. Early intervention and targeted stretches can prevent minor irritation from turning into a debilitating tear.

Elbow Pain: It's Not Your Paddle's Fault

Elbow pain along the pickleball courts is rampant—and for good reason—but it's rarely because of the paddle. Instead, tight grip and arm-dominant mechanics overuse the forearm muscles and tendons, triggering what players often call "tennis elbow" or "golfer's elbow."

Common Causes of Elbow Tendon Pain

1. **Faulty grip technique:** Holding the paddle too tightly loads extra tension into the forearm muscles.
2. **Arm-dominant swings:** Using mostly the wrist and forearm instead of engaging the whole body and core.
3. **Insufficient rest:** Not allowing the tendon inflammation to settle between matches.

Aligning your technique, loosening your grip, and respecting rest days will pay dividends here. I always keep a light resistance band in my paddle bag for quick forearm stretching and strengthening after a game.

Why You Should Not Play Through It

One mantra I've heard from every orthopedist and PT I've interviewed is this simple, non-negotiable rule: **do not play through pain**. Ignoring discomfort encourages inflammation, worsens microtears, and sets you up for longer recovery times and more serious injury risk.

If you're experiencing calf tenderness, sharp "shot-like" pain, or any of the rotator cuff or elbow symptoms described here, pause your play, ice the area, and seek professional evaluation if it doesn't improve in a few days.

Natural Support: How Joy Organics Organic CBD Gummies May Help

Many players I've spoken with are increasingly turning to holistic options for support during recovery and to manage inflammation without relying solely on NSAIDs. Joy Organics has been a standout name for cleaner, high-quality products, and their organic CBD gummies are popular for their ease of use and consistent dosing.

While CBD isn't a miracle fix and shouldn't replace medical treatment, it can be part of a well-rounded recovery strategy, especially for chilling out sore muscles and promoting restful sleep—two huge factors in recuperation.

Final Thoughts: Play Smart, Warm Up, and Respect Your Body

In summary:





- That “shot in the leg” sensation is most often a sign of tendons and muscles stressed from repetitive play rather than an isolated injury.
- Aging tendons increase injury risk without proper warm-up, rest, and conditioning.
- Rotator cuff and elbow pains are common pickleball complaints rooted in mechanics and overuse, not equipment blame.
- Do not play through pain—it only prolongs recovery and worsens injuries.
- Consider natural aids like Joy Organics organic CBD gummies as part of a comprehensive care plan.

Remember to count your warm-up minutes out loud, check in with what has changed in your recent play schedule, and listen to your body’s signals. Your pickleball passion is important—keep it healthy, happy, and long-lasting.

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