

'IT HURT TO JUST SHAKE HANDS OR PICK UP A CUP OF TEA'

SURGEON Nick Fernandez has always enjoyed a sporty lifestyle. He counts windsurfing, cycling and running among his favourite activities but he was left in agony after a gruelling doubles tennis match with friends triggered the onset of tennis elbow.

For Nick, 56, an occasional tennis player, gripping the racquet so hard for the duration of a match was enough to bring on lasting pain. "It was a pretty vigorous game and afterwards my elbow became very painful," says Nick

(left) a father of three from Dorchester, Dorset, who works as a consultant orthopaedic surgeon.

"Over the next six weeks or so it got worse and worse. It made everything difficult. It hurt to shake hands with my patients or even pick up a cup of tea. Operating was also pretty uncomfortable."

Nick tried physiotherapy but it failed to fully alleviate the pain. He

was also reluctant to try steroid injections, another common treatment. "I know how painful they can be and they can also cause a bit of tissue damage. I really wasn't keen," he says.

Instead he opted for a new form of therapy that uses shock waves to stimulate the healing process in and around the damaged tendon. Called low-energy extracorporeal shock

wave therapy it is based on technology developed 20 years ago to treat kidney stones by smashing them up with shock waves.

A hand-held probe is placed next to the skin and shock waves fired into the joint at the rate of 15 pulses a second. It works by stimulating blood flow and the growth of new blood vessels in the damaged area. Nick tried the new therapy

when his colleague Dr Nick Savva at the private Winterbourne Hospital in Dorchester had a shock wave machine, called the **Swiss DolorClast**, on trial.

"I had four bouts of treatment, each one lasting about 10 minutes.

It was a bit uncomfortable as it produces a hammering sensation but it was no worse than a trip to the dentist," says Nick. "It felt better

straightaway because the shock waves numb the area. After four sessions I was pain-free. That was more than a year ago and I've had no problems since. Many of my own patients get tennis elbow but until you have it yourself you don't realise quite how uncomfortable it really is.

"Now I no longer dread shaking patients' hands."

● To find your local shock wave clinic visit www.spectrumtechnologyuk.com



Picture: SWNS