Dear Sir,

The extensor carpi ulnaris (ECU) tendon is enclosed within its own sheath, which stabilizes the tendon within a groove along the distal ulna and is distinct from the extensor retinaculum (Spinner and Kaplan, 1970). Forceful wrist supination, flexion and ulnar deviation may result in attenuation or rupture of the ECU sheath, leading to subluxation or dislocation of the tendon out of its groove, typically in a palmar and ulnar direction (Burkhart et al., 1982, Inoue and Tamura, 1998). Clinically, patients may present with a painful snapping or clicking sensation over the dorsoulnar wrist during forearm rotation.

We describe a novel clinical test to aid diagnosis of the condition by asking the patient to simulate the action of scooping ice cream using his/her hand. This manoeuvre is then repeated against resistance and direct palpation of the tendon by the examiner (Figure 1). The wrist is first positioned in full pronation, ulnar deviation and extension, and then as the ice cream is scooped, the wrist is slowly moved into full supination while maintaining ulnar deviation against resistance from the examiner’s other hand. The test is considered positive if there is visible, audible or palpable snapping of the ECU tendon over the distal ulna and concurrent reproduction of the patient’s symptoms.

Compared to simple forearm rotation, the ice cream scoop test accentuates subluxation of the ECU tendon, if present, and may allow identification of a more subtle form of instability. It is easy for the patient to comprehend and simple to perform.

Figure 1. The patient is asked to simulate the action of scooping ice cream using their hand against resistance and direct palpation of the tendon by the examiner.
Conflict of interests
None declared.
Informed consent has been obtained.

References


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