

GOLF: INJURY PREVENTION

Introduction

Golf injuries are common. The #1 cause of golf injuries is from the golf swing. The asymmetric movement pattern, when combined with poor technique, is at risk to cause notable problems for the back, hips, legs, abdominal muscles, lower extremities, shoulders, elbows, wrists and hands. Of all the medical conditions, low back pain is the #1 problem for golfers. Approximately 50% of amateur male golfers have low back pain, and 28% of women. This is followed by shoulder, elbow and wrist problems. Women in particular tend to be at greater risk for shoulder and upper body issues, due to poor upper body strength. With all this said, *golfers love to golf!* Thus, golfers need to do everything they can to limit the risk of developing a medical condition, having an injury or surgery, which prevents playing golf.

Staying in the Game!

There are a number of ways in which golfers can help themselves limit the risk of being sidelined from golf for a period of time. Outlined below are a few recommendations.

- Approximately 3 months before golf season begins, commit to a series of total body stretching and strengthening exercises that involved the key muscles involved in the golf swing. Perform the exercises regularly (every other day). This will help protect the body from common golf-related injuries and will enhance the quality of your golf swing. [Refer to the patient handouts on stretching exercises and strengthening]
- Always warm up before beginning stretching or strengthening exercises (i.e. brisk walk or treadmill 3-5 minutes)
- Always perform a series of stretching exercises for 5 minutes prior to practicing or playing golf. [Perform stretching exercises when the body is warm.] [Refer to the patient handout on stretching exercises]
- Avoid excessive practice (> 30 minutes) prior to or when golf season begins. Golfers have a tendency to hit an excessive number of practice balls, for a long period of time. The body is not conditioned for the number of repetitions. Gradually ease your way into hitting balls for longer periods of time. Consider two short practice sessions (< 30 minutes) a day (one am and one pm) versus until fatigued.
- Once golf season begins, exercise and practice your golf on days when you are not playing golf.
- If you play a fair amount of golf, it is a good idea to have your golf grips replaced on an annual basis.
- Ask the golf pro to look at your grips and be sure they are the proper size for your hands. Too, ask for their opinion on golf balls and gloves for you. Little changes can make a favorable difference in your game!
- If you are considering new clubs, reach out to your golf pro or golf fitter for recommendations.
- Avoid adverse weather conditions for playing golf, especially cold weather combined with wind, rain or sleet.
- Avoid hitting a ball against the edge of a bunker or tree root. *Take the penalty!* The penalty is painful for one game...hitting an obstacle that could result in a serious wrist, elbow or shoulder injury may last a lifetime.
- A light golf grip results in less risk of a wrist injury.
- Avoid hitting off mats as much as possible. Most mats have concrete directly under the mat. This results in notable mechanical vibration and compressive forces throughout the arm. Injuries are common off a mat.
- Particularly if you are returning to golf after a period of time away from the game, try to limit divots. A large percentage of injuries occur from impact with the downswing.
- If you are recovering from a recent upper extremity surgery, you can still do many exercises for your lower extremities and core. This is ideal as strength and flexibility in the core and lower extremities are key to a quality golf swing and reduce the risk of upper extremity medical problems. Too, this will set you up for a quicker transition back into golf.
- In the past, if you have experienced pain along the outside of your elbow ("tennis elbow"), consider wearing a counterforce brace the initial month you begin playing each golf season. This will limit the risk of recurrence.
- Often you can practice putting within the early weeks following an injury or surgery. Ask your therapist or surgeon. Putting on a regular basis can take 2-3 strokes off your score and be valuable to your game!
- If you do get sidelined from golf for a period of time, stay connected with your fellow golfers. You can walk or ride in a golf cart with your friends to socialize and stay involved in golf. It will be great for your mental health!
- Eat healthy...fresh fruit/dark green vegetables, fish, lean meats... You know the importance of this!
- Drink water regularly throughout the day. Overall, women should drink 90 ounces and men 125 ounces of water daily for quality health. Water promotes healing in your muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints.
- The stretching and strengthening exercises are essential to limiting an injury and playing your best golf!
- *Enjoy this amazing game! Enjoy your fellow golfers! Stay healthy! Have fun!*