

Golf Injury Prevention-Part 1

There are over 30 million golfers in North America, and the popularity of the sport has skyrocketed in recent years. Dr. Tom La Fountain is a chiropractor who travels with the PGA tour and regularly provides chiropractic to the pros. Dr. La Fountain reports that up to 85 percent of the injuries on the PGA Tour and Senior Tour relate to the spine, and about 70 to 75 percent of those golfers receive regular chiropractic care.

I know all too well the frustration one faces when suffering from a sports injury. As an avid golfer, I have experienced how we contort our bodies into oddly twisted postures 120 times over three or four hours, coupled with the fatigue from several miles of walking. As chiropractic doctor, I treat golfers with injuries that result from improper instruction and poor physical conditioning which can be a recipe for potential chronic lower-back trouble.



The symptom of back pain is a warning sign that there is an underlying problem that will likely get worse. Unfortunately, most golfers continue with poor form and technique until they get injured, before they look for help.

The golf swing subjects the lower back to rapid, complex and intense loading patterns. The golf swing generates a peak compression load of more than eight times the body weight in both amateurs and professionals, where as running and rowing only generate four to seven times body weight, respectively. It is not surprising that 62% of golfers will incur an injury directly related to the sport.

Proper joint mobility allows the golfer to have a complete, full turn for his or her back swing and permits the hips to clear toward the target producing power and accuracy. The more flexibility and strength a person can develop the longer that golfer will hit the ball. For amateurs and week-end golfers, proper warm-up and stretching exercises are paramount because with intermittent activity flexibility is something that the body loses quickly. Flexibility can be regained with time and proper instruction, but most golf publications show many stretching exercises that may be very wrong for you. In fact they may cause injury to your back and neck. That is why you need to be evaluated by a health professional that knows specific rehabilitation and how it relates to golf.

Golf Injury Prevention-Part 2

Here are some great ways to extend your golfing career and help reduce the likelihood of becoming injured on the golf course.

- **Purchase equipment that fits.** Don't try to adapt your swing to the wrong clubs: A six-footer playing with irons designed for someone five inches shorter is begging for back trouble.
- **Take lessons from a Pro.** Learning proper swing technique is critical. At the end of the swing, you want to be standing up straight; the back should NOT be twisted.
- **For senior golfers.** If you show some signs of arthritis in the hands, consider a larger, more specialized grip for added safety and performance.
- **Warm up before each round.** Dynamic stretching before and static stretching after 18 holes is the best way to reduce post-game stiffness and soreness. Take a brisk walk to get blood flowing to the muscles; then do a set of dynamic stretches. To set up a stretching and/or exercise routine, see a health professional or golf pro who can evaluate your areas of tension and flexibility.
- **Keep your entire body involved.** Every third hole, take a few practice swings with the opposite hand to keep your muscles balanced and even out stress on the back. Vijay Singh has used this technique for many years to keep his spine in proper alignment.
- **Drink lots of water.** Dehydration causes early fatigue, leading you to compensate by adjusting your swing, thus increasing the risk of injury.
- **Take the "drop."** One bad swing -- striking a root or a rock with your club -- can damage a wrist. If unsure whether you can get a clean swing, take the drop.

- **Wear orthotics.** These custom-made shoe inserts support the arch, absorb shock, and increase coordination. Studies show custom-made, flexible orthotics can improve the entire body's balance, stability, and coordination, which translates into a smoother swing and reduced fatigue. While the upper part of a shoe may score style points, what the foot rests on affects your game.
- **Avoid metal spikes.** They tear up greens and can increase stress on the back. Soft shoes or soft spikes allow for greater motion.