

GOLF INJURIES AND PREVENTION: LOWER BACK PAIN



Article contributed by Dr. Inge Austin D.C., BS, R.N.
Doctor of Chiropractic
Bachelors in Exercise Science
RN in Psychiatry and Neurology

What do Tiger Woods, Fred Couples, Jim Furyk, Jack Nicklaus and Davis Love all have in common with many of the average SCC golfers? It certainly isn't the proper swing mechanics or loads of cash from winning golf tournaments!

What these pros have in common with a lot of you is that they all have missed significant playing time, because of episodes of low back pain.

Lower back injuries are the most common golf related injuries followed by, elbow, wrist and shoulder injuries. Occasionally golfers suffer from hip and knee pain as well.

So what are the causes of such an injury? Whenever dealing with an injury, one must evaluate the tissues involved. Golf injuries most commonly involve the nervous system, soft tissues such as muscles, tendons and ligaments, as well as the bony structures that they are attached to. The cause of an injury will depend on which structures are the weakest at a given moment of time.

Since the spinal bones, also known as vertebra, are generally strong structures, it is more likely that the muscles and tendons attached to this will tear first, before injuring the spine. This is also known as a strain. A muscle or tendon can be partially torn or fully torn, depending on the degree

of injury. This tear can develop over time or happen suddenly.

The most common mechanism of injury is the twisting and pulling that takes place during the golf swing against a spine that is not moving through its full range of motion. Decreased flexibility and muscular imbalances can play a key role as well. Faulty swing mechanics and lack of a proper warm up routine increase the risk of an injury.

In the event of an injury, discontinue the aggravating activity and apply ice to the injured area as quickly as possible. Ice can be applied up to a maximum of 20 minutes per hour. Never place ice directly onto the skin, since it may burn your skin.

As if low back pain is not enough, now you have two problems to deal with. After two to three days, switch to a heating pad or warm compress to help loosen tight muscles and increase blood flow. Contrary to popular opinion, research shows that lying in bed all the day can make the condition worse.

Light activity promotes healing. Avoid heavy lifting, prolonged sitting, repetitive bending or anything that aggravates the pain. Golfing should be suspended until the pain subsides. This may take up to several weeks depending on the severity of the injury. Additional therapies include electrical stimulation, ultrasound and spinal adjustments to decrease the pain.

Sports massage can be employed after the acute phase to realign the scar tissue and allow for proper healing. Acupuncture has shown beneficial results as well. If the condition persists, please seek professional advice.

HOW CAN THESE CONDITIONS BEST BE PREVENTED?

Proper swing mechanics and good postural setups are critical not only for a powerful swing, but also to minimize the stresses imposed on the lower back. Furthermore, strengthening the

abdominal and lower back muscles will help to stabilise the spine during the swing phase and in turn produce more powerful, longer shots.

Strong quadriceps, buttock and hamstring muscles are another important key factor that should not be neglected. During the swing the entire body weight is transferred from one leg to the other and if there are any weaknesses present in those muscle groups, it will result in a wobbly swing or hip sway, which will lead to a diffusion of power and increase the risk of injury.

In the next edition, we will introduce a simple golf specific strengthening and stretching programmes that will allow you to prevent injuries and become a better golfer.

This is the second of a series of articles on Golf Injury and Prevention. Stay tuned for the next instalment. For immediate questions please contact the author directly at Dr.IngeAustin@yahoo.com