

GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS! GOLF : TECHNIQUES AND INJURIES

Golf is a sport that has become hugely popular over the last number of years. Most clubs have a waiting list for membership. The type of person playing golf has also changed. Previously largely the preserve of the older man moving away from contact sports, now golf attracts people from all walks of life and especially more women and young people.

For some reason, a myth seems to exist that golf is not a real 'sport' but more of a hobby. By this I don't mean to offend the real dedicated golfers by suggesting that it is not to be taken seriously. Rather, I mean that golfers don't tend to prepare physically for their game in the same way as they might if they were going for a jog or to play a game of soccer. How many golfers will do a stretch routine before every round or do strength exercises at home to perfect a safer technique? Very few. Make no mistake, golf is a very physically demanding sport for the body. There is a huge number of golf related injuries occurring right across the board from amateur to professional status, far too many to mention here. I'm going to explain how technique can cause injury and how to avoid injury by warm-up.

The whole golf swing can be described as a controlled free fall of the trunk. The trunk is allowed to swing quickly forwards coming up to impact and then the back and hip muscles are activated to quickly pull the trunk back up after impact. This puts a huge amount of strain on the back. In studies done, back pain is found to be the most common golf injury. Back injuries are also found to occur most in the takeaway and follow through stages of the swing. Therefore, good basic trunk control is vital to preventing back problems. Professional lessons will obviously help. But lessons alone won't provide the muscular strength and control that's needed. Contact your local Chartered Physiotherapist for specific training for the trunk muscle groups that you need for good control. The next most common area of injury is the arm, from the shoulder to the wrist. In research that I carried out on golf technique, I found that injured golfers tended to have a poor wrist cock at the end of the backswing compared to the non injured golfers. Again, this is something a golf pro can help with, but if the strength and flexibility just isn't there, then you will need to be shown specific exercises to help develop these muscle groups.

Apart from preventing injury, doing a good warm-up has been shown to improve performance by allowing greater range of motion and preparing the muscles for the activity they are about to undertake. There are too many stretches for me to reproduce them here, so I suggest you get your hands on one of the many 'improve your golf' type books. But remember, all stretches should be slow, i.e., held for at least 10 seconds, should not be bounced, and should be pain free, just stretchy. If in any doubt at all, make an appointment to see your local Chartered Physiotherapist and bring your exercise programme with you.

Common injuries that do occur include, obviously, low back pain, shoulder tendonitis, tennis and golfer's elbow, wrist joint strain, wrist tendonitis, knee ligament strain and neck pain. The basic principles of sports first aid apply to golf the same as they apply to any other sport. Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation (neck and back pain would be the only exceptions to this rule). Once

you have done this, contact your local Chartered Physiotherapist for treatment, and make sure you follow the rehabilitation programme that is set out for you. I think you will find that, after recovering from your injury, your golf will improve because you have the right combination of technique awareness, flexibility and strength to make the most of your game.

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