

PAIN FREE ON THE FAIRWAY: How to Improve your Golf Game with a Healthy Back

If you are one of thousands enjoying the fastest growing sport in North America, then you know how satisfying it can be to beat your personal best score, or to win that company golf tournament. You also know how frustrating it can be to play poorly or miss a game due to an injury. The nature of the golf game itself leaves us prone to injury. During a typical round, you will swing your club approximately 100 times! Talk about repetitive strain! The golf swing is one of the most explosive and unnatural of all sport movements, and relies on the coordination of several muscle groups. If you are unprepared for your season and don't follow proper technique you may be in line for a rotator cuff, shoulder, or back injury. Don't cut your season short this year, exercise caution, and follow these simple pointers to keep swinging healthy and give yourself a competitive edge:

1. Before you start your game, be ***proactive about your health***. Have your spine, shoulders, and other joints assessed by your chiropractor for proper mobility and function. Joint dysfunction over time can lead to pain, muscular imbalance, and poor coordination. Associated nervous system irritation, postural changes, and spinal degeneration can result, leaving you susceptible to further injury.
2. Ensure that you have the ***proper equipment***. Clubs that are too short force you to bend unnaturally and those that are too long force you to lean back causing stress on the back. Wear comfortable golf shoes and have your feet checked by a chiropractor or podiatrist. You may benefit from custom-made golf orthotics, which will support the arch, absorb shock, and increase coordination.
3. ***Stretch the muscles of your back and shoulders*** before and after you play. Although men are typically stronger than women, they are not as flexible! Flexibility will avoid muscle strains, muscle tears and help both men and women maintain a consistent swing. Stretches are simple and don't need to take a lot of time. You can even use one of your clubs as support while stretching. Try placing one hand on the club while it is resting on the ground, and stand with one foot ahead of the other. Then bend both knees and lunge forward to stretch your hip muscles. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds on each side. You can also grasp both ends of the club, hold it above your head and slowly angle your body toward each side, holding for 30 seconds. This will help to stretch your low back and abdominal muscles. There are many other stretches that can assist you with your game. Consult your health care provider or personal trainer to have a custom program designed for you.
4. When ***lifting your golf bag*** or reaching for the ball, always bend your knees and keep your back straight. Golf bags with dual straps distribute the weight evenly and reduce stress on your back, but only if you wear both straps! If your bag has only one strap, switch shoulders frequently to avoid muscle fatigue and imbalance. Keeping your body well balanced will provide consistent swings
5. Try ***shortening your back swing***. This will minimize the torsional stress on your lumbar spine (low back) and give you more control of the club throughout the swing. Short back swings have been shown to achieve the same club head speed at ball impact as long back swings. You can also reduce stress on your back and put yourself in a power generating position by ***standing close to the ball***. Standing further back causes you to bend forward and reduces the effective energy transfer to the ball.
6. Lastly, work on developing a ***relaxed, rhythmic golf swing*** and avoid intense muscle contractions. Hitting the sweet spot on the club head will send your ball further than missing the sweet spot with a higher club speed.

More than three quarters of golfers will experience at least one injury this season. By using common sense, taking your time, and keeping these simple tips in mind, you can play pain free this summer, and you may even improve your game. For more information, or to have a specific golf stretching routine designed for you, call Dr. Godin at Cole Harbour Chiropractic, 435-WELL.