

Save Your Back and Lower Your Score

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Some people assume that Golf requires little of the athleticism required by most other sports. This is untrue on many levels. Consider that a golfer is required to contort the body and spine into oddly twisted positions in order to generate enough torque required for a good swing. Couple this with a spine that is bent forward and repeat 75 times. (That's if you're good, most weekend warriors shoot more like 120.) Combine all this with walking a few miles and the associated fatigue and you have a recipe for potential back trouble and other injuries.

Most part time golfers play until they get hurt and then look for a fix or some sort of solution. Chiropractors advocate taking a pro-active approach with any sport and golf is no exception. A few simple tips can help improve your game and reduce the chance of injury.

1. 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.
2. Take lessons. Learning proper swing technique is critical. At the end of the swing, you want to be standing straight up; the back should not be twisted. Players with poor swing technique tend to get frustrated, which leads to greater tension and increased risk of injury.
3. Wear orthotics. These custom-made shoe inserts support the arch, absorb shock and increase coordination. An orthotic can improve the entire body's balance and stability, which translates into a smoother swing. While the upper part of a shoe may score style points, what the foot rests on affects your game.
4. Avoid metal spikes. They tear up greens and can increase stress on the back. Soft shoes or soft spikes allow for greater motion.
5. Warm up before each round. Take a brisk walk to get blood flowing to the muscles before stretching out. (To set up a stretching and/or exercise routine, see a doctor of chiropractic or golf pro who can evaluate your areas of tension and flexibility. No one set of stretches works for everyone.) Once you're loose, take 15-20 practice swings.
6. Pull, don't carry, your golf bag. Carrying a heavy bag for 18 holes can cause the spine to shrink, leading to disk problems and nerve irritation. Walking the course is not only great exercise but also is a recommended tip for saving your back. If you prefer to ride in a cart, alternate riding and walking every other hole, bouncing around in a cart is hard on the spine.
7. 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.
8. Drink lots of water. Dehydration causes early fatigue, leading you to compensate by adjusting your swing, thus promoting injury risk. Don't smoke or drink while golfing, as both cause fluid loss.

Some common injuries golfers struggle with is back pain, sciatica, neck pain, shoulder pain, wrist pain and golfer's elbow. The tips noted above can greatly reduce the likelihood of these injuries. Sport specific training is also very important. Sport specific stretches and / or weight lifting programs suggested by your Chiropractor can allow for greater range of motion and flexibility. The increase in strength and balance can also help improve your game and lower your score. However, if your usual score is 110, don't expect to shoot a 75 after your first adjustment or training session.

Fitness and training for golf is extremely important and is compounded by the fact that many golfers are strictly weekend warriors. They attack the links as soon as the weather permits and end up with extremely sore muscles that haven't been used all winter. This can also put excessive stress on the spine and spinal joints, resulting in poor spinal mechanics. As irritation builds up around spinal nerves, a decrease in power, speed, hand-eye coordination and consistency can occur. All of which can have devastating effects on one's score. Chiropractic care can restore balance to one's spine and return proper nerve function which in turn helps develop the repetitive impulses sent from the brain to the limbs and back again that are required for consistency and proper swing mechanics. This increases your body's ability to react to feedback through your nervous system. Tiger Woods has been quoted as saying that Chiropractic treatments are as important to him as practicing his swing. He also credits physical fitness and Chiropractic for improving his game. Remember the best treatment for injury is prevention.