

GOLF

Golf season is finally here and a great number of people are happy to practice this sport. Don't forget however that some things can't be bought in stores: namely good physical shape! In fact, back pain and golfer's elbow are among the most common injuries in golf. We estimate that a quarter of players have or will suffer from injuries by practicing this activity. It's true that in terms of sport injuries, golfing is less risky than others, more extreme, such as football and hockey. But since it's a sport where the physical and cardiovascular demand isn't as significant, we often neglect getting ready to play and believe we are invincible, which is unfortunately not the case. When you consider the spinal rotation that goes into a golf swing and the fact that the speed of the club can reach 160 km/hour, it's easy to understand that golf puts significant biomechanical stress on the body. The most common injuries occur in the torso, shoulders, wrists and spine. The majority of these injuries are due to poor technique or poor joint and biomechanical function.

Here are tips to improve your game and prevent injuries:

TAKE THE TIME TO STRETCH

Stretching is essential to having fun. Here are a few examples. Each stretch should be held for 20 seconds each.

1. While waiting to be called for your tee-off, take 6 minutes to physically get ready for the game. Jump for 1 minute.
2. Position yourself 1 meter from a bench. Place your left foot on the bench and bring your hips as forward as possible. Rest your right elbow on the outside of the left knee and turn your body to the left. Repeat on the other side.
3. Standing with your feet slightly apart, tilt your head to the left. With your left hand behind your back, pull on your right arm. Repeat on the other side.
4. Hold a club above your head. Lean as far as you can on each side.
5. Put your left foot forward as much as possible. Bend your left knee to form a 90 degree angle. Bring your shoulders back and use your clubs to keep your balance. Repeat on the other side.
6. Hold a club and swing it from front to back. Begin with very slight movements and within one minute, do complete swings.

After the game...

Repeat this series of stretches after the game. It's at this moment that your muscles are at their most vulnerable to injuries, because they are contracted and need to be relaxed. If you don't stretch after the game, you could hurt yourself simply by putting your bag in the trunk of your car.

- Every golfer should include strength-training exercises in their routine. Strengthening all major muscle groups is essential to maximizing your performance. Core body strength and flexibility helps breathing and oxygen flow, as well as preventing injury to your back. Muscle is also an important shock absorber that helps prevent strains and sprains.

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after your game. Sorry, beer does not count. Remember that once you are thirsty, you are already starting to dehydrate. Dehydration affects your energy level and your physical functioning.
- Use a wheeled golf cart for carrying heavy clubs. If you must carry your golf bag, use both shoulder straps. This will spread the weight across a greater area. If there is only one strap, alternate sides frequently. If you find that your bag is getting too heavy, put it down and take a break.
- When wheeling your golf cart, push rather than pull.
- Golf requires long periods of standing. Frequently alternate your weight from one foot to the other or rest one of them on your golf bag or cart.
- Take care of your feet! Make sure you have the proper shoes for your type of feet. Golf shoes with short cleats are the best.
- Use the right technique for your physical capacity and limits. Adopting a golf swing based on your physical and biomechanical capacity is important. Amateurs are usually better off adopting a classic golf swing, which enables the hips to turn nearly as much as the shoulders to minimize spinal twisting. If in doubt, consult a golf pro.
- Lastly, have fun. The right attitude is good for your performance and your overall health!

Preventing shoulder injuries

Shoulder injuries in golfers are common due to the repetitive nature of the swing. To reduce shoulder pain, try these two tips.

- Shorten the backswing slightly. Instead of ending the club head at the 3 o'clock position, stop at the 1 o'clock position.
- Strengthen your shoulder, scapular, chest and back muscles. Your chest and back muscles are large and generate the power in the swing.

Preventing elbow, wrist and hand injuries

- Select larger and softer club grips and use a neutral grip.
- Select irons with large heads and graphite shafts to lessen vibration.
- Select the correct club length.
- Strengthen your forearm muscles.

Chiropractors – here to help

Chiropractors can help prevent back problems by showing you golf exercises and stretches. Should you suffer an injury from golf, a chiropractor can also provide treatment for your pain.

Fact: 80 per cent of Canadians will suffer from back pain in their lifetime. If required, a chiropractor can treat your pain through a variety of methods. These can include: spinal and joint adjustment, modalities such as ultrasound or TENS, soft tissue therapy and therapeutic exercises.

Improve your game without the pain. Have a great season!