

Golf – preventing injury

Golf is a popular sport and offers a range of health benefits. Regular golf can help improve stamina, cardiovascular fitness and muscular endurance. For example, the average golfer playing an 18-hole game walks about seven kilometres.

While the risk of injury from playing golf is low compared to other sports, common golf injuries include injuries to the lower back, shoulder, elbow, wrist, head and eye.

Risk factors

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- **Time spent playing** – generally, the more often you play, the higher your risk of injury. Golfers who spend more than six hours per week in competitive play are at increased risk of overuse injuries, as are professional golfers.
- **Unsupervised children** – injuries to children under the age of 10 years are often the result of inadequate adult supervision: for example, children getting hit in the face by swinging clubs.
- **Incorrect technique** – examples include poor swing style and hitting the ground instead of the ball. Incorrect technique dramatically increases the risk of injury. Golfers who perform correct technique are less likely to injure themselves.
- **Failure to warm up and cool down** – warming up and cooling down are extremely important to reduce the risk of muscle and joint injuries.
- **Previous injury** – golf can aggravate existing injuries.

General health and safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Make sure equipment, such as clubs and shoes, are professionally fitted.
- Be sunsmart. Wear a broad-brimmed sunhat and use sunscreen factor 30+ on all exposed skin. Sunscreen and insect repellent should be carried in your golf bag at all times.
- Drink non-alcoholic fluids before, during and after the game. Take drinks with you in your golf bag to avoid dehydration during play.
- Practice the rules and etiquette of the game; for example, make sure that no one is standing too close when you're about to swing and always call out 'fore' to warn others before you take your shot.
- Obey all safety instructions when driving a motorised golf cart.
- Postpone play if lightning strikes are possible.

- Avoid placing hands in holes/areas where spiders or other dangerous insects might inhabit.
- Supervise young children on the golf course at all times. For example, make sure they don't stand too close when someone is teeing off and don't allow them to fool around with golf clubs.
- Ensure adequate rest between games.
- Carry a mobile phone, wherever possible, in case of emergency.

Warming up is very important

Muscle strains and sprains are more likely to occur if you fail to warm up properly before play. A study of golfers undertaken by the Sports Injury Prevention Unit at Deakin University Victoria found that less than three per cent of Victorian golfers warm up properly, while nearly half don't warm up at all. Suggestions include:

- Walk briskly for a couple of minutes to raise your heart rate.
- Warm up your neck and upper back by dropping your chin to your chest, gently rolling your head from side to side in slow half-circles.
- Warm up your shoulders. Hold a golf club horizontal to the ground, keeping your hands about shoulder width apart. Slowly raise the club overhead, hold for a few moments, and lower. Hold the golf club in a similar way but this time behind your back. Raise as high as you can, hold for a few moments, then lower.
- Warm up your torso with side bends. Slide your hand down your leg to support the weight of your torso.
- Twist through the waist; gently and slowly turn from one side to the other.
- Go through the motions of swinging the club without actually hitting a ball. Begin with gentle half swings and work up to full swings over the course of a few minutes.
- Cool down after activity. Use the same range of stretches suggested above.

See over ...

Take care of your back

Suggestions include:

- Consider using a buggy to transport your clubs, or carry clubs using a supportive carry brace.
- Carry out a general strength and fitness program that includes weight training or aerobic activities, for example walking or jogging, to improve muscle strength, flexibility and endurance.
- Strengthen abdominal muscles to support the lower back. A Canadian study found that golfers with strong side abdominal muscles (obliques) have a reduced incidence of back pain.
- Take lessons with a registered Professional Golf Association coach to improve your technique to prevent injury and improve performance.

Game-related tips

Suggestions include:

- Don't engage in long practice sessions, particularly if you are practising the one shot over and over.
- If you are practising your putting, make sure you straighten up and stretch regularly.
- Remember to bend your knees when picking up balls. Lift one leg off the ground as you lean over to counterbalance your weight.
- Try not to use more force than is necessary for the swing, especially in the 'follow through' motion after the ball has been hit.
- If the game is particularly slow – for example, if you're stuck behind a slow-moving group – avoid long periods of standing still. Walk around in circles, or take the opportunity to perform some gentle stretches.

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Stop immediately if injury occurs. Playing on will only exacerbate the injury.
- All injured players, irrespective of how severe the injury is, should seek first aid or prompt medical treatment of their injury.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) with rest, ice, compression, elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and referral to a health professional.
- Injured golfers should not resume play until they have completely recovered from their injury.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Professional Golf Association coach
- Physiotherapist
- Victorian Golf Association Tel. (03) 9889 6731
- Women's Golf Victoria Tel. (03) 9523 8511
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 73 98 99

Things to remember

- Common golf injuries include injury to the lower back, shoulder, elbow, wrist, head and eye.
- Warm up thoroughly before play to reduce your risk of muscle and joint injuries.
- Remember to bend your knees when picking up balls. Lift one leg off the ground as you lean over to counterbalance your weight.
- Take golf lessons to improve your technique.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by, Smartplay. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria.

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