

AVOID GOLF INJURIES

Question: When it warmed up, I went to the driving range and hit a bucket of balls. Toward the end, I swung and had rather severe low back pain, almost dropping me to my knees. How do I avoid this in the future?

Answer: Bending and twisting create a lot of leverage and stress to the low back. Hitting one golf ball after another probably fatigued your muscles. However, walking 18 holes can be demanding as well, especially combined with repetitive swings and the elements.

The American Chiropractic Association suggests the following to avoid back pain and improve your game:

Purchase equipment that fits. Don't use the wrong size clubs. If you have to bend over to reach for a shorter club, you are asking for trouble.

For the women golfers, don't use clubs designed for men. Not only are they often too long, but the shaft may not be flexible enough for a woman's grip. Women do better with lighter, more flexible materials such as graphite.

Men need to stretch. Men are traditionally stronger than women, but usually less flexible. Better flexibility translates to less injury and a better golf swing. You need to warm-up before trying to blast the ball off the first tee. Simply doing some brisk walking initially followed by some general stretches and easy swings may be all you need. Your doctor of chiropractic, physical therapist or golf pro can help you with specific stretches. Stretching after your golf game can be very productive in achieving even more flexibility now that your muscles are warm.

For senior golfers: If you have arthritis in your hands, consider a larger, more specialized grip for added safety and performance. You may also benefit from more padding to your golf gloves.

Take lessons. Learning a proper swing is critical. At the end of the swing, you want to be standing up straight and not twisted at your back.

Wear good shoes. Your shoes need to be comfortable. Avoid metal spikes as this can increase the stress on your low back. Soft shoes or soft spikes allow for better flexibility. Foot orthotics can provide a solid foundation for your swing. Orthotics also will decrease leg fatigue as you stand and walk.

Pull, don't carry your golf bag. Carrying your bag causes compression to your spine. Bouncing in a cart can also cause pain. Walk when possible, assuming you have no limitations, such as a heart condition.

Keep your muscles balanced. Every third hole, take a few practice swings in the opposite direction to keep your muscles balanced and even out stress on the back.

Drink lots of water. Dehydration causes fatigue, which in turn increases your risk of injury. Smoking and drinking alcohol should be avoided while golfing as both cause dehydration.

Take the "drop". One bad swing -- striking a root or a rock with your club -- can damage your wrist. If unsure, simply take the drop.

Use ice on "golfers elbow". Golfers can develop pain on the inside aspect of the elbow, called medial epicondylitis. Golf can aggravate this; ice will help to calm it down.

All golfers are excited to get on the course. Take your time and ease into it after being dormant all winter. Most doctors of chiropractic treat the spine as well as other joints such as shoulder and knee pain. Consult your chiropractor if your pain persists.

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Dr. Tom Konicki is a board certified chiropractic orthopedist and has practiced for 17 years in South Dayton. You can reach him at www.kschiro.com or mail your questions to Ask the Chiropractor, 2165 Miamisburg-Centerville Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.