

## Is Your Game Hurting?

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Physical Therapists with “Body Balance for Performance”

Many players tell us that they thought it was ‘normal’ to play with lower back pain. Just because a lot of professionals on tour do—doesn’t mean we should too!

**W**hy does a sport like golf produce so many injuries? Even though golf is a non-contact sport, it is not a non-impact sport. The impact is obviously the club hitting the ball and the ground. Studies have shown that golfers produce approximately 90% of their maximal muscle force during the golf swing.

Very few golfers prepare appropriately for the sport (and it is indeed a sport!) in terms of warming up, stretching and golf-specific strengthening. Add to this some poor swing mechanics and improperly fit clubs and it becomes pretty clear that many golfers will experience a golf-related injury at some time.

We unfortunately have to treat these injuries daily in our Body Balance for Performance centers before we can progress to the performance aspects of their programs. Some of these injuries include wrist and elbow tendonitis, shoulder (especially the muscles of the rotator cuff), neck and low back strains.

The wrists and elbows often become over stressed when a golfer has to rely too heavily on hand and forearm action during the swing. Over time, this golfer can develop microscopic tears in the small muscles and tendons in the wrist and forearm. Often, the underlying reason why the arms are being overused is the lack of rotational flexibility in the mid-spine and hips. (The loss of mobility in these two areas will be a common theme underlying many of the injuries we will discuss.)

If the mid-spine and hips are not flexible enough to produce an efficient and safe golf swing, the arms take on too much of the workload. Over time this will lead to breakdown in the wrists and forearm muscles. The other main reason why they get injured is from a too steep downswing which leads to hitting very fat shots. The continual impact of digging excessively into the ground leads to injury. Another reason for injury in the upper body can be from playing with clubs that are too heavy or too stiff.

The next golf-related injury that we typically see is a strained or torn rotator cuff tendon in either shoulder joint. This injury is usually the result of a chronic address posture that is too rounded in the shoulders and mid-

back. Coincidentally, this is the same posture that a lot of our clients have while sitting at their desks all day. This posture forces the tendons of the shoulder to get over-worked because the spine can become frayed. Hitting lots of balls off hard practice mats can also lead to several overuse injuries.

Another reason why rotator cuff injuries occur relates to the golfer who, either because of poor swing mechanics or poor flexibility, makes an overly flat backswing. This flat position can really strain shoulder joints over time, especially the left in the right-handed player.

The neck is also an area that commonly gets injured during the swing. This injury is often related to a golfer who keeps their head down well after impact. When the head stays down excessively as the entire body is moving left through impact, there is a tremendous amount of stress placed on the muscles and joints of the neck. Annika Sorenstam has been criticized in the past that she might bring her head up too soon in her swing. It certainly hasn’t hurt her physically or financially!

The last golf-related injury we will discuss is actually the most common that we treat—the infamous lower back strain. Many players tell us that they thought it was ‘normal’ to play with lower back pain. Just because a lot of professionals on tour do—doesn’t mean we should too! This pain is usually caused by a combination of poor mid-spine flexibility, poor hip rotation mobility, weak abdominal support and/or inefficient weight shifting throughout the swing.

As we discussed earlier, the mid-spine region must be able to supply the majority of the rotational swing flexibility, but often it can’t do its job because of poor posture and/or inherent joint stiffness in the spine. The hip joints also need to have good rotational flexibility for a safe and efficient swing.

Often those golfers who suffer from low back pain have the unfortunate combination of poor hip rotation and poor mid-spine mobility. This leads to trying to rotate through the lower back, which it is not designed to do. It is designed to mostly bend forward and backward; i.e. bending over to touch your toes or bending backwards to put a light bulb in overhead.

If the low back is forced to rotate time and time again, eventually dysfunction and pain will result. With tightness in the body directly above and below the low back, it becomes pretty easy to see why it is the most common body part injured. About 10% of all professional sports-related injuries are to the spine, however, professional golfers have about a 40% incidence of low back problems at sometime during their careers.

Golf shouldn't hurt! Everything in golf that prevents injury also improves your performance. That's a great combination. In the August issue of *Golf Chicago!* we will show you how to prevent some of the most common golf-related injuries. Please feel free to contact us at 312-214-9079 if you have any questions. We are also making a special offer to our *Golf Chicago!* readers (who make it to the end of our articles): 50% off their initial evaluation...that's a \$125 value and the first step to pain free golf! 

## Golf Chicago! TV

- Sun., July 25, 5:30PM Show #7
- Mon., July 26, 3:00PM Show #7 (R)
- Thur., July 29, 3:00PM Show #7 (R)
- Sat., July 31, 5:30PM Show #7 (R)
- Wed., Aug. 4, 3:30PM Show #7 (R)
- Sun., Aug. 8, 5:30PM Show #8
- Tue., Aug. 10, 3:30PM Show #8 (R)
- Sat., Aug. 14, 3:00PM Show #8 (R)
- Sun., Aug. 22, 5:30PM Show #9
- Thur., Aug. 26, 12:00PM Show #9 (R)
- Sat., Aug. 28, 3:00PM Show #9 (R)

All listed times are Central  
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