

THE SCIENCE OF HEALTHY GOLF

ENSURING THE LONGEVITY OF YOUR GOLF GAME BEGINS NOW

By Jason Brewton – Director of Physical Therapy at Texas Back Institute / www.texasback.com

Golf is a skilled but leisurely sport when compared to fast-paced cardiovascular-based sports. This means that many golfers do not prepare the same way they would for sports like soccer, basketball, football, etc... But should they?

We often like to emulate professionals in any given sport. Professional golfers do not roll out of bed, grab a quick coffee and cereal bar and make it to the course 5-10 minutes before their tee time and do a few quick stretches before teeing off on hole number one. Why do so many of us expect to be successful in our game and avoid injuries doing this very thing? I think the answer goes back to how we view the game...leisurely. Let's try a fresh approach to the game of golf and avoid some common mistakes.

Pre-game should allow enough time to prepare to play the often-challenging game. A golfer should be both hydrated and well fed. The average round of golf is roughly four hours, which is much longer than many other games. This means your body will need calories and hydration while on the course, so why not start out right? A proper warm-up and stretching is essential for both good play and avoiding injury. Allow enough time to do some dynamic and static stretches of the trunk, hips, lower extremities, shoulders and arms. Five to 10 minutes of stretching can properly prepare the muscles and other soft tissues for the forces that will be required of them. A warm-up should also include practice swings with different clubs. There is much debate about which clubs to warm up with first, but it makes the most sense to begin with shorter clubs that require less force. Progress to your driver, which will, by design, be the first club you use off the tee box. Last, but not least, don't forget the sunscreen and sunglasses. Four hours is a long time to be in the sun and sunburns that could have been avoided do not make for good golf. The glare on a bright day can strain the eyes, and as your game progresses, this can make your ability to see

and strike the ball squarely and consistently more difficult.

Mid-game habits are important as well. There can be significant time between shots so keep stretching while waiting for your next shot to avoid stiffening up between shots. Take time to stay hydrated by drinking that water you packed and eat a snack if you feel your blood sugar is waning. Don't forget to reapply sunscreen midway through your game. To avoid injury play within your normal swing parameters avoiding over-swinging which places you at risk of injury.

Post-game stretching is important no matter if you walked or rode in a cart while playing. Take 5-10 minutes before your muscles tighten up to stretch just as you did in your pre-game prep.

Sometimes injuries do occur and taking them seriously is very important. If you feel a strain or pain in your back or other area during a shot, take a few minutes to do some area specific stretching and test the area to see if the pain persists. More than likely it was just a transient pain but in the event it does persist...**DO NOT FINISH THE ROUND.** I wish I had dollar for all the patients that said they felt a pain but continued playing only to injure themselves to greater extent. Do not underestimate your body's ability to compensate for pain. This can alter your body mechanics causing a much more serious injury with a longer recovery time. If you have a persistent pain with swinging you should rest from the activity [golf], ice the area, use NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) and begin gently mobilizing the area. If pain persists longer than three to four days, you should see a professional to examine the extent of your injury. When returning to golf following an injury, begin slowly with slower and less aggressive swings to build your strength and form back up.

Golf is a fun game but like any sport there are necessary preparations that should be followed to avoid injury and allow you to play at your best.