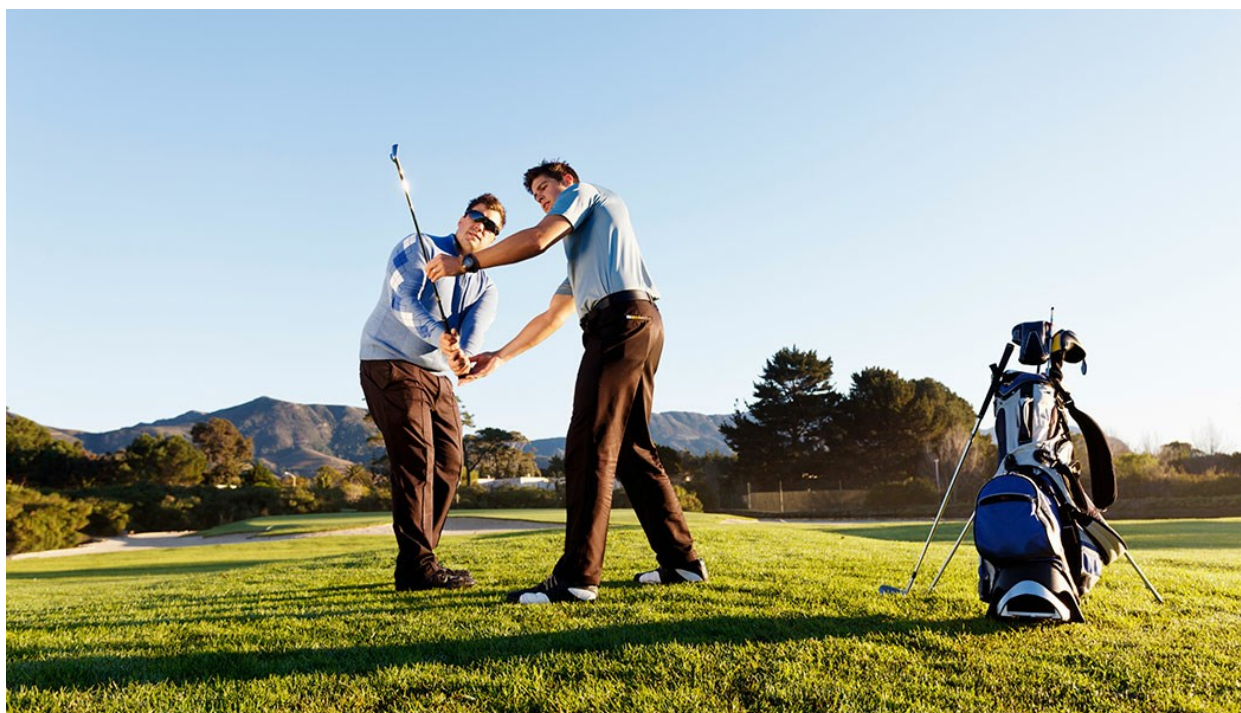

Golf - preventing injury

Summary

- 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.
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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 for golfing injuries

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of a golfing 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.

Health and safety suggestions for golf

Suggestions include:

- Make sure equipment, such as clubs and shoes, are professionally fitted.
- Be SunSmart. Wear sun protective clothing, use SPF30+ (or higher) sunscreen and lip balm, wear an appropriate hat, seek shade where possible and wear sunglasses.
- 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 if your shot appears to be heading in their direction.
- Obey all safety instructions when driving a motorised golf cart.
- Postpone play if lightning strikes are possible.
- Avoid placing hands in holes or areas where spiders or snakes 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.
- Get adequate rest between games.
- Carry a mobile phone, wherever possible, in case of emergency.

Warming up before playing golf

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 in 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 then 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 the activity. Use the same range of stretches suggested above.

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, such as walking or jogging, to improve muscle strength, flexibility and endurance.
- Strengthen abdominal muscles to support your lower back. A Canadian study found that golfers with strong side abdominal muscles (obliques) have a reduced incidence of back pain.
- Consider taking lessons with a PGA qualified coach to improve your technique to prevent injury and improve performance.

Golf-related tips

Suggestions include:

- Don't engage in long practice sessions, particularly if you are practicing 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.

Treat a golfing injury promptly

Suggestions on what to do if you are injured include:

- Stop immediately if injury occurs. Playing on will only exacerbate the injury.
- All injured players, regardless 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 injured 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
- Golf Victoria Tel. (03) 8545 6200
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

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.

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