

# Preventing Golf Injuries

Fair weather golfers are hoping that warm weather is just around the corner and are breaking out the clubs and golf shirts in eager anticipation. As with every sport, the anticipation is a mere part of the equation and planning and preparation become the larger part of the process. Good preparation and conditioning can go along way to help prevent golf injuries, and it is highly recommended that the eager golfer take the time necessary to prepare physically for the riggers of the sport.

Having given enough time to physical preparation the golfer may still experience assorted golf related injuries due to improper technique, equipment or physical limitations, and some times just plain bad luck. This article will review a few of the more common golf related injuries and give some practical suggestions to help recovery.

Professional athletes and amateur golfers can suffer from **rotator cuff injuries**, which are often characterized by deep pain in the upper arm. This pain may lead the sufferer to believe the injury is in the arm when in reality, it is in the shoulder. The stress of forceful repetitive motion such as a golf swing can erode the muscles in the rotator cuff. This can result in varying degrees of soreness and reduced movement.

To fully understand the condition of rotator cuff tendonitis, it is important to know some of the basics about shoulder anatomy. The rotator cuff is comprised of four small muscles, which originate in the shoulder blade and insert on top of the humerus (upper bone of the shoulder). By design, the shoulder joint is very mobile, but not very stable.

The rotator cuff is designed to provide dynamic stability to the shoulder joint during basic movements. For example, during the follow through of a golf swing, when arm muscles are activated, the rotator cuff is triggered to keep muscles and bones in proper alignment for the swing. When the end of the shoulder blade and upper arm impinge the rotator cuff, it can cause sharp pain. If left untreated, the injury can lead to continued inflammation and/or tearing of the rotator cuff.

Prevention and treatment of Rotator Cuff Injuries:

To prevent rotator cuff injuries, golfers can perform several exercises to stretch and strengthen not only the rotator cuff muscles, but also the surrounding muscles of the shoulder. Fortunately for both amateur and professional athletes, non-surgical and surgical treatment is available for rotator cuff injuries. An athlete who suspects a rotator cuff injury should visit his or her physician for a complete evaluation. The doctor will test each muscle affecting the shoulder and may prescribe a physical therapy regimen to stretch tight muscles and strengthen weak ones.

In case of 'impingement' or pinching of the tendons, anti-inflammatory medicines may be taken orally to reduce swelling. Besides modifying one's swing and taking a break from the links, some golfers suffering from severe rotator cuff injuries must undergo surgery. Following surgery, patients will likely participate in a physical therapy regimen that will focus on mobility and strengthening of the effected shoulder.

**Golfers elbow**, more properly called medial epicondylitis, is an inflammation of the tendon on the bony prominence (epicondyle) on the inside of the elbow. The epicondyle is the point of origin, for muscles, which flex the wrist and fingers. Therefore, activities, which require a forceful or repetitive gripping, pulling or pushing can strain these small

muscles and cause inflammation of the epicondyle. Symptoms of golfer's elbow include pain and local swelling on the inside of the elbow, as well as weakness in the hand and forearm.

The prevalence of medial epicondylitis among golfers earned it the nickname of golfer's elbow. There are several factors, which cause this common condition among golfers. The first cause stems from overuse. Just as overuse can lead to a sore back or shoulder, excessive strokes can lead to inflammation of the forearm muscles, especially the weak and untrained muscles of a novice golfer. Also, many players overuse their rear hand in their swing, causing excessive strain on the muscles in that arm. Many beginners try to power the club through with the hand, instead of using it properly to guide the club through the swing. In doing this, the wrist and finger flexors of the forearm are overloaded and this can lead to a strain. Also, missing the ball on a stroke and hitting the ground with the club during an attempted stroke can cause a traumatic injury to the flexor muscles and start the inflammation process.

If you are suffering from golfer's elbow, the following steps will help ease the pain and get you back to the golf course

- Rest the arm by taking several days off from golf.
- Avoid painful motions or switch hands to perform tasks.
- Apply ice to the elbow with an ice pack or ice massage three to four times a day.
- Apply a support brace just below the elbow.
- For persistent pain, seek medical treatment.

If the pain persists for an extended period of time, you may want to seek medical treatment. In some cases doctors may prescribe anti-inflammatory medications or cortisone injections to decrease inflammation. Rarely, in some chronic cases, surgery is required to release tension on the epicondyle and remove scar tissue.

Physical therapy may be used to decrease pain and inflammation. With physical therapy patients can work to restore flexibility and strength to their elbow. Physical therapy treatments include phonophoresis, which uses ultrasound to introduce anti-inflammatory medication to the area or iontophoresis, which uses electrical current to introduce anti-inflammatory medication. Under the guidance of a physical therapist, patients can also perform gentle stretching and strengthening exercises and gradually increase them.

Before returning to golf, it may help to talk to your local golf professional about improving your swing. He or she may offer suggestions for changing your grip or positioning to minimize the stress on the forearm muscles and prevent future problems.

As you return to play it is important to progress slowly and methodically from putting to chipping and then to full swings. A thorough warm-up of forearm, wrist and finger stretching prior to play will also help prevent further problems.

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Tidewater Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Associates, P.A. has provided comprehensive physical therapy and rehabilitation services to patients in Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland for over 22 years and currently has 18 locally owned offices throughout the shore. For more information please consult our website at [www.tidewaterpt.com](http://www.tidewaterpt.com) or call 1-800-736-3020.