



PHYSICAL THERAPY HELPS GOLFERS

Posture, Fitness, and Flexibility Are Key to a Better Game and to Avoiding Injuries

The achievements of golfers such as Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, and Lorena Ochoa highlight a new athleticism associated with a sport that was once considered "leisurely." Today's amateur and professional golfers, men and women alike, are stronger, more flexible, and wielding more powerful swings than ever before.

According to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), awareness of proper posture and the importance of fitness and flexibility are just as important for weekend golfers as they are for the pros. Dr. Desirea Caucci, of Conshohocken Physical Therapy, has training in golf fitness and has treated many golfers for ailments restricting their golf game. Says Caucci, "Golfers spend thousands of dollars each year on new or improved equipment, but their most essential piece of equipment is their bodies."

Be Prepared to Excel

According to Caucci, the nation's estimated 35 million golfers need to take the time to work at their game and their conditioning if they want to excel on the course. "Golfers should have access to a physical therapist who can assess their physical abilities and provide individualized training programs that address musculoskeletal balance, body mechanics, strength, posturing, and cardiovascular fitness," notes Caucci.

This is Not Your Father's Golf Game

Just as in professional tennis, there has been a significant increase in injuries among professional golfers, primarily because the game has changed so drastically and training has become so intense. Strength, flexibility, and endurance are just as important as exceptional driving distance and keen putting skills. It is now the norm, not the exception, for professional men and women golfers to work with physical therapists and athletic trainers on improving these factors. But, warns Caucci, it is vital that these programs be tailored to their individual skills. "Certain types of training may actually hinder-not help-athletes," she says. "What may be acceptable for a professional football player may not work for a golfer."

The Swing's the Thing

Professional golfers make it look easy, but the golf swing is actually one of the most difficult and complicated movements in all of sports, requiring stability in some joints and flexibility in others. "Having proper motion, strength, and function throughout the swing play a large role in preventing injuries," says Caucci. "The payoff of a better swing is a more accurate ball strike, greater distance, and reduced stress on the muscles and joints."

Keeping Injuries at Bay

Caucci observes that her patients who are primarily weekend golfers often complain of spinal-related injuries, including upper and lower back, shoulder, and neck pain. "Leisure golfers attempt to swing with the speed and force of professional athletes, but they have to remember that with each swing, seven to eight times a golfer's weight is directed into the spine. With this kind of force, it's easy to damage discs and strain muscles," says Caucci. She says that multiple core (not just abdomen) stabilization exercises are critical.

Golfers of all ages and abilities should make a habit of warming up and stretching before teeing off, adds Caucci. "It is important for golfers to spend at least 20 minutes warming up and stretching all the major muscle groups, especially the back and extremities, before practice or play. They shouldn't wait until they're on the course before stretching, because that is neither practical nor conducive to a thorough stretch," she says.

Cardiovascular conditioning also plays a crucial role in performance, observes Caucci. Fatigue can result in poor performance due to a lack of coordinated body movements. To keep endurance up and muscles warm and

conditioned, Caucci suggests golfers walk the course whenever possible, as continued aerobic conditioning is an essential component of golf fitness.

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. PTs examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Physical therapists also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.

Conshohocken Physical Therapy is a privately owned and operated physical therapy practice focusing on quality, one-on-one care for every patient. Providing individualized care, including golf fitness evaluations and treatments. The highly qualified staff includes two doctors of Physical Therapy who utilize a truly family-centered approach that serve to distinguish the practice.

Providing personalized care to every patient